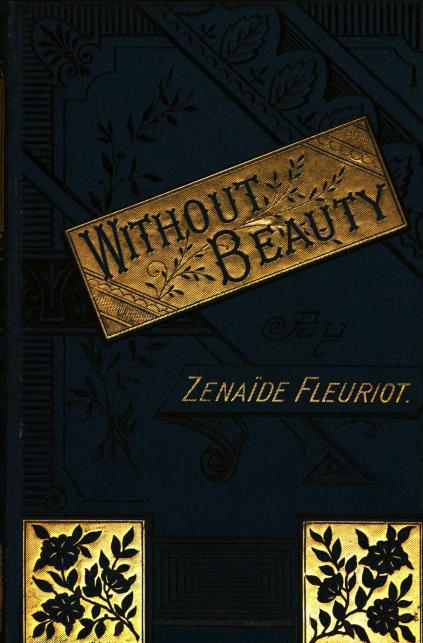
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WITHOUT BEAUTY

OR

The Story of a Plain Woman

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

MLLE. ZENAÏDE FLEURIOT

BY

ALICE WILMOT CHETWODE

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The Story of a Plain Moman.

T.



NEED not tell you, dear reader, that I am ugly: the name of my book assures you of the fact. But you may not understand that I have always been ugly.

Good-looking people can easily declare that they were plain as children; the present atones for the past; but many others love to think that there was a time when their irregular features were charming, and they will coolly say, "at two years old I was lovely."

That is so long ago that there is often no proof to the contrary; and often it is quite a

possible thing. Unmitigated ugliness is seldom impressed on the face of a child; and, on the other hand, the prettiest children often grow up ugly: the transformation is constantly to be seen.

But I cannot console myself with the belief that a moment of beauty was ever mine. My stepmother has often told me that when I was first presented to my grandfather, he looked at me attentively, and said: "What a little fright! God bless her!" Afterwards, when I was, I believe, two years old, I was taken to an aunt, whose name will often be mentioned in the following pages. She embraced me, and exclaimed: "She is very pretty; she takes after her uncle." Now, my uncle, the departed husband of this aunt, was physically a sort of monster; his marriage proved that love is blind. My aunt was pleased, and that was enough.

I have sometimes wondered by what sad chance it happened that my face was so plain. My father was a fine, handsome man. I remember him well; and I have been told that my mother was lovely. This, indeed, I know to be true, for I have two pictures of her: one is a miniature of a fair, pale woman, with a rose in her hand, whose hue is not more delicate than

that of her cheeks; the other is graven on my memory, a faint image unimpaired by time.

I was hardly four years old; I lived in an atmosphere of tenderness and love. I knew my mother, and I loved her with all the strength of my childish heart. One day I was taken into her room; she was in bed, as usual, for she had been for some time too ill to get up. I was lifted on the bed; she sat up and took my hands in her thin ones, and looked long at me. Tears filled her eyes and rolled down her colourless cheeks.

Her image, as she then appeared, abides in my memory; that pale face, so to speak, was there enshrined. When I wish to see her again, I close my eyes, and I behold a wan woman, with fair hair and blue eyes fringed with brown lashes, whence great tears are falling. And I compare my two pictures, and find that they resemble each other; but the one drawn by the painter is full of the brilliant freshness of health, and the one within my heart shows illness in its most touching form.

A week after that visit to my mother's chamber she died. I did not mourn her then, but I have bitterly mourned her since. The love that was then quenched would have been all for me; it would have shone on my existence, and nurtured all that was good in me.

I should have been loved, spite of my plainness—for my plainness, even. They say that a mother is fondest of the children little favoured by nature. She makes the balance even, and the unfair estimate of the world is put right in the family; there, each is valued for moral, not for physical excellence. For my sake, my mother was sorry to die.

"My daughter," she used often to say, "will not be attractive in the eyes of the world; she needs her mother the more."

When she had breathed her last, I was sent to my Aunt Desirée, who at once had an old black dress of her own unpicked. Her only servant made me out of it a garment which might have been called a blouse, or a dress, or a wrap. I made many difficulties about letting it be put on, and with much weeping begged to be taken back to my mother. Aunt Desirée told me she had gone to heaven. I did not well understand where that country, to which many people seemed to go, might be, and I got very angry. They told me that God had called her away, and this appeared to me so hard that for two days I would not say my prayers. Aunt Desirée got

me a little dog, and Renotte, her maid-servant, took me out on the donkey which Aunt Desirée used to ride when she went to Mass, and I was consoled.

I spent the four happiest years of my life with my aunt. My father was travelling to seek relief from his sorrow; from time to time he wrote to ask how I was. I was idolised by the two old women, who thought they could not do enough to amuse me. On Sundays and Thursdays, a little nephew of Aunt Desirée's, who lived with his uncles in the neighbourhood, used to come and play with me. Between these gentlemen, whose name was Du Bressy, and my aunt there had been a sort of coolness, the reason of which I, of course, did not know; but René was allowed to come to Rosevale.

He was a good little boy of twelve; his manners were those of a peasant, but he amused me extremely. He was an intrepid bird-nester, an indefatigable runner, and a first-rate player at ball. I did not think him very clever, and I took advantage of my superiority on this point. I was the queen, and he was my slave. When I was tired, I used to say: "René, you are to be my horse." He would stoop down in the most obliging manner till I mounted, and, holding by

his hair or his ears, I guided him as I thought fit.
The length of his ears is due to me; every day
I pulled them a little, and he made no objection.

It would have been impossible to find a child happier than I was. Freely, constantly, and fully did I enjoy the best things that God has made for man.

The house was my sleeping-place, my refuge on wet days, and that was all; and even while it was pouring I used to put on my sabots, and, with an old camlet cloak about my shoulders, take my accustomed little walk. The fresh air and the sunshine, the songs of the birds, and the murmur of the running water, were life to me. Without being able to analyse the pleasures I enjoyed, I instinctively loved nature, which to me was not merely a thing of colours and sounds, but a harmony with which my little soul was filled.

Till I was six years old I was very indifferent as to religion; but one day Aunt Desirée told me that the good God made the sun, and sky, and trees; and as they were so beautiful, I began to love Him from gratitude.

A child is at once thoughtless and active; I never undertook any serious business with greater ardour than that which animated me in what I called my work at Aunt Desirée's. In the morning there was the door of the hen-house to be opened, and when this was done I used to come into the yard, accompanied by my noisy tribe, each one of which was a personal acquaintance, and bore a name derived from the colour of its plumage or from some feature in its character.

Aunt Desirée would laugh till her eyes were full of tears when I used to take several turns round the grass plot, preceded, surrounded, and followed by my poultry; I might have walked a mile without a fear that one of them would stray. If I ran, they ran; if I stood still, they stood still. My little dog, Azor, did not follow me more faithfully.

After my walk I threw them some corn, and I called my pigeons to share the repast, watching with a long rod in my hand to see that no injustice took place. I spent the rest of the morning in looking for the hens' nests, in attending to my little garden, and in brushing Azor's hair.

In the afternoon I started again, and was accompanied by a little girl from the farm. We used to go and see the men working in the fields, to visit the shepherds, to build little houses of clay beside the running brooks, to

look for flowers and to cut grass for my pinkeyed white rabbit. As long as I kept within the bounds assigned to me by Aunt Desirée, I might roam in freedom through my verdant kingdom; I might at my own sweet will wander from the meadow, whose soft carpet was sprinkled with the white, golden-hearted narcissus, into the field of waving corn, where the blue cornflowers grew up amongst the blades.

This country life made me vigorous; I drew back from no ditch, and there was no brook whose width stayed my course.

In the evening a sort of weariness would come over me, and as soon as I came to Aunt Desirée's room, where a fire burned all the year round, I always fell asleep on her lap.

Then Renotte would undress me as gently as possible, and lay me in my little bed. The two women then said their beads, talked for a few minutes, and separated for the night.

In the morning I was awakened by the birds, and got up to begin a day much like its predecessor.

My first difficulty arose when Aunt Desirée considered it time for me to learn to read. I wept, I besought in vain; every day I had to learn for an hour. This hour seemed to be

stolen from my pleasure, and I used to come to my aunt with tardy steps and downcast mien. She took no heed of this, but put on her spectacles, laid a book open on her knees, and began the lesson. I looked at her and looked at the book; and even now I can see the momentary air of severity which was most unlike the usual expression of her countenance.

Aunt Desirée, who seemed to me extremely old, was at this time about fifty; she was of medium height, which made her healthy stoutness appear excessive. The straw arm-chair which she filled was ample enough easily to hold René and me, with Azor lying between us. Her portly frame was surmounted by a neck whose round outlines were marked by some deep creases. Her face was red and puffy, but essentially benevolent. Except when she was engaged in her devotional exercises, she had always a smile on her lips, and her small gray eyes were full of gentle mirth. There was really nothing unpleasant in this good large face; and I confess that to me it seemed beautiful.

Renotte was a great contrast to her mistress: she was tall and angular, her skin was dark, her gait was that of a drum-major, and there was something ascetic in her countenance. Her dress was severe in its style, and under her snowwhite, well-starched cap, not a hair was to be seen.

She was Aunt Desirée's foster-sister: they had never been separated, and they mutually confided everything to each other. If Aunt Desirée heard any news she at once called Renotte, that she might impart it to her. If she read of anything interesting in her newspaper, such as a declaration of war, a murder, or a mad dog, it was quite necessary that Renotte should at once share it.

Aunt Desirée never had any children—this was the one sorrow of her otherwise happy life. Renotte had never been married, for a very good reason—she never met with anyone who wished to marry her till she had reached an age when people do not think of marrying, and when there was reason to fear that her comfortable savings had not been without their influence on the proposal.

All the dormant tenderness of the two women was aroused for me: I was a child, and woman's heart is leavened with maternal love. The life and mirth which I brought to the house supplied a want in their lives; with equal affection I kissed Aunt Desirée's ruddy countenance and

Renotte's parchment face, and the caresses which they had sadly missed would have made them excuse anything in me.

I was just eight years old; I was supple, active, strong, and plain, but my plainness was of a healthy and vigorous kind. I could almost read, my writing was like that of a cook, or perhaps rather worse, and I was going to finish a garter for Aunt Desirée, whose leg I measured half-a-dozen times a day, with many complaints of its size, stretching my knitting to try and make it go twice round the massive pillar, when an event occurred which rudely broke the golden chain of my days and almost gave my aunt an apoplectic fit.



II.



Y father, as I have said, only wrote occasionally, and his letters had for some time been unusually few. My

aunt was surprised and annoyed; but she did not reproach him, fearing that he might think well to take me away from Rosevale. She was all-in-all to me, and I seldom thought of my father, unless I wanted to alarm Renotte.

If Renotte refused me anything, I used to say, proudly, that I was going to write and ask my father to come for me. Once I even ran to the table where Aunt Desirée's paper and pens were lying, and I began a letter with the word Sur. This shows how completely he was a stranger to me.

I need not say that Renotte yielded to my fancy; my determined way of taking up the pen made her seriously afraid that the letter would be sent.

One morning, while I was busy with my chickens, I saw the postman coming. I ran to meet him, and he gave me, with my aunt's newspaper, a letter for her in a handwriting which I knew.

I went to Aunt Desirée, who was in her sittingroom, and said: "Here is your newspaper, aunt, and a letter from Mr. Perceval."

My aunt took her spectacles, scolded me for my way of speaking of my father, and broke the seal. For some months he had been in Paris, and I had a great hope that some day he would send me a beautiful plaything. I stood there, looking at Aunt Desirée, and expecting to hear some good news. But she became purple, then her face swelled and grew black, she threw herself back in her arm-chair with a groan, and I ran to her.

"Air! air!" she gasped.

I looked round in terror, not knowing how to give her what she wanted, and then darted off to call Renotte.

I returned with her, and she began by opening all the windows, and then unfastened my poor aunt's dress, which seemed to give her relief. My aunt looked at me, and I thought there were tears in her eyes.

"Go and play, Gabrielle," she said, with an effort, and as I did not stir, she added: "I am not ill now; do as I tell you, my child."

I went out, but her face had not regained its natural colour, and my anxiety kept me close to the door. I tried to find a way of seeing her without being disobedient, and I cut away the listing which filled up a little space between the wall and the ill-fitting door, and looked through.

Many strange thoughts occurred to my mind: could my father be dead? and was Aunt Desirée shut up with Renotte to make me a black frock? Or had some beautiful toy which he had sent me been broken or lost?

At last Aunt Desirée, after blowing her nose ten times, took breath, and began to speak. I listened eagerly. "Well! my poor Renotte," said she, crossing her short arms on what might have been her waist, "the misfortune we foresaw has come: Mr. Perceval is going to marry again."

Renotte heard these tidings unmoved.

"You might have expected it, ma'am," she remarked, sententiously.

"And I certainly did expect it, Renotte; yet, when I remember that his marriage with my poor

Gabrielle was a love-match, I think it is very ungrateful of him."

"Men are all the same," said Renotte, with asperity.

"It is dreadful! God knows nothing on earth would have made me take anyone after my poor husband died."

"And if I had married for love," answered Renotte, "I could never have married a second husband."

Had I been ten years older I might have been amused at these two elderly women making declarations of faithful devotion such as no one could possibly have entertained for them. As it was, I could not help trying to understand this conversation, which to me was most mysterious. My father was going to be married; so much I could understand, and the fact did not much affect me. But Aunt Desirée and Renotte continued to speak about marrying; did they intend to be married, too? My spirit rose against the idea of all the marriages which seemed to be plotted.

"But," continued Aunt Desirée, who turned from violet to purple, "what would his marriage matter to me if he would but leave us our child?" "Does he want to take her away?" criecal Renotte, her dark eyes flashing.

"Alas! he does. He thanks me for the care I have taken of her, and says that he will come for her when he brings his young wife to Daniel Ville."

And Aunt Desirée, who had been making fearful faces in the effort to refrain from weeping, burst into tears. Renotte's sallow complexion became yet more sallow; her long face grew longer; her lower lip, which generally projected in front of her upper one in an ungraceful manner, now hung down, from the general discomposure of the facial muscles.

"You will never allow it, ma'am," she exclaimed, while the tears rolled down her hollow cheeks.

"But he won't ask my leave; I can't dispute his right; if he wishes to take her, he will take her."

"But I won't let him take me," I cried, rushing in wildly. Then I threw myself on Aunt Desirée's neck, in a fit of sobbing.

And now began a scene of general weeping and groaning, which continued for some minutes, till these two excellent creatures repressed their grief in order to console me. Some sad days followed. Aunt Desirée and Renotte had often red eyes, and when I came into the room suddenly I used to find them weeping at the prospect of parting. My father was not coming back till spring; there were still two months before me—two months are to a child's mind an age. The dreaded moment seemed to me to be in the dim distance, and I resumed my sports with the light-hearted carelessness of my tender age.

Very likely my aunt and Renotte often talked of my departure, but in my presence they seldom alluded to it.

To satisfy her own conscience, my good aunt sometimes spoke to me of my father, telling me that I must love him and my stepmother; and Renotte repeated her sentiments. I used to listen, and say that no doubt I would love them a great deal; and then, seeing a shadow cross the kind faces, I would add, "But not so much as I love you, Aunt Desirée." And she would chide me gently—so gently that I saw it would have grieved her to have it otherwise.

About a month after the arrival of the weighty letter, I observed that Aunt Desirée and Renotte became more melancholy, and for two whole days nothing was said about the fourth divine commandment.

The third day was a Thursday. René had come, as usual; but it was raining so heavily that we could not go out to amuse ourselves. While my aunt was taking her customary afterdinner nap, I brought René into the drawing-room, and, as some visitors had called the day before, it occurred to me to propose that we should play at visits.

"You must be the gentleman," said I, "and I will be Aunt Desirée; when I am ready I will cough, and you must knock at the door."

He placed himself obediently, like a sentinel, outside the door, and I prepared to play the part of the lady of the house. I installed myself in the middle of my aunt's arm-chair, put two books on the ends of my frock to keep it spread out so as to fill the chair; then, seeing my aunt's spectacles on the stand, I fastened a thread to them and put them on as well as I could. And to complete the effect, I took up an open letter which was lying on the table, and began to read it over the spectacles, forming every word with my lips, as Aunt Desirée often did.

The writing was large and legible, and I read the following words: "I am very sorry, my dear cousin, to hear of Mr. Perceval's marriage. This young lady is a worldly little flirt, and does not seem to me fitted for her new position; I hear nothing pleasant of her disposition, and I am much distressed to say that I fear your little Gabrielle will find her a regular stepmother..."

"Are you nearly ready?" asked René, who was tired waiting behind the door.

"Wait a moment; I will soon cough," was my answer. But at this crisis we were interrupted by Aunt Desirée's arrival. I went off with René, and when we were alone I said to him: "René, what is a stepmother?"

"I don't know," said René.

I shrugged my shoulders and considered the matter. Without completely understanding what I had read, I instinctively supposed that a stepmother was something dreadful, and an uncomfortable impression remained on my mind from what I had read in my thoughtless play.

René did not know why I was so serious, and thought I was tired of playing indoors. He therefore went to ask Aunt Desirée if we might go out. As the day had cleared up, she gave us leave, and we ran off to a little pond, which had been dug the previous Thursday, and which we hoped to find full of water. It was, indeed, full; and while René, with his hands in the clay, remoulded one of the sides which had given way

I began to sail some nut-shells, guiding their course with a long poplar twig. At the same time I tried to see what had become of two little fish which we had, with great trouble, caught in the river.

At last I perceived one of them lying on its back, and I exclaimed, with tears in my eyes: "Look, René! the poor creature must certainly be ill."

"It is dead," was the cool reply of René, who did not love animals as I did. "When fish turn upside down in that way, they are dead. Where is the other?"

"There;—but, dear me! it swims very badly. It is going to die, too. Do catch it, Reué, and we will take it back to its father and mother."

"That is not what it wants," said René; "this water is too muddy for it."

"Then let us put it back into the river."

But René wanted to people the little pond. The fish, which he had taken such pains to catch, belonged to him; the other, the dead one, was mine; and he would not give up his property.

We had a long discussion. First, I tried to prove that the dead fish belonged to him, and that I had a right to dispose of the survivor. But he broke down my argument by asking me how I knew my fish, adding, that as he had caught both, they were in his power.

We got excited, and I ended by bursting into tears at the thought of the fate to which we were deliberately dooming the fish. My tears weighed more with René than my words; and while he muttered something about crying babies, he took off his shoes and stockings, and after many evolutions he succeeded in catching the poor little creature.

We ran to the river, where I had the inexpressible pleasure of seeing the captive dart off over the shining sand. In the fulness of my gratitude, I threw my arms round René's neck and kissed his clay-soiled face, saying: "I will get Aunt Desirée to make us some chocolate cream; and, when I am big, I will be your wife."

"I don't care about that," was the ungallant reply;—"and you are wetting my face. Do you really think Aunt Desirée would make the cream for this evening?"

Before I could say a word, we heard the galloping of a horse. I hid myself behind a tree, wiped my eyes, and looked at the horseman.

He was a tall man, with a sun-burnt face, and a beard which had signs of gray. He reined in his horse before crossing the bridge, and, turning to René, whom he doubtless took for a little peasant, asked him if the road led to Rosevale.

"Yes, sir," said René.

"Would you show me the way? I have never gone by the short cut, and I am afraid of losing myself."

René simply turned his back.

"Do you hear?" asked the stranger. "If you will come I will let you ride on my horse; I should like to walk the rest of the way. Your little companion may come, too," he added, guessing that some one was behind the trunk of the tree, towards which René had looked.

"Go," said I to René; "I will run home by myself."

René was completely won by the promise of a ride. The stranger dismounted, and René jumped up without touching the stirrup.

"And the other boy—is he not coming, too?" inquired the gentleman, pointing in the direction of the tree.

"It is a little girl," said René, "she will walk home."

They set off. I watched them, and when they were hidden by the turn of the path, I left my

hiding-place and began to run across the fields towards the house. On the way I tarried to gather a nosegay, and to observe a bird which seemed to be choosing a place for its nest; and when I reached home, a general search for me was being made. René, who met me, told me that Aunt Desirée wanted me in the drawing-room. When I entered the room, the strange gentleman, who was seated near her, got up hastily and came towards me. I drew back towards the door with a startled air.

"Gabrielle," said my aunt, with her most serious expression of countenance, "come and kiss your father."

My father looked at me; he seemed touched. He kissed me again and again, and I heard him say, turning to my aunt: "Just now, when she came in, and drew back in that shy manner, she reminded me of her poor mother."

Aunt Desirée looked down and coughed, and said I was like her.

"It is the same countenance," he said, with a sort of embarrassment;—"but how tall and stout she is! I should not have known her."

My father spent an hour with us; he and my aunt kissed each other, and he seemed in a hurry to go. In taking leave, he said he would send for me the next day; but Aunt Desirée exclaimed against this. My things were at the wash! I had not a cap crimped! she had only begun the heel of the last stocking she was ever to knit for me!

My father must have been unwilling to distress her, for he accepted these vain reasons, and it was settled I should go in a week. When the day had been fixed, he started, after having embraced me and cordially thanked my aunt for all the care she had bestowed on me.

My poor aunt was completely indifferent to his gratitude; and when he had mounted his horse, I heard her say to Renotte, most sorrowfully: "He will take her away, Renotte; he says that people would blame his wife for not having the child with her; but he will be sorry for what he is doing the day my will is opened. He has asked me to go to Daniel Ville, but I would not put my foot inside the door for the world; I could not bear to see anyone in my poor niece's place."

TTT.

HAVE not forgotten, and I never can forget, my departure from Rosevale.

This first sorrow left deep traces on my heart. It was my entrance on the way of sorrows which we call life. Among the griefs that I have undergone, it still holds a place—it is the first link in a chain.

When I had taken a hasty view of the things and places dearest to me, and saw the old carriage ready in the yard, a feeling of despair came over me: I could not tear myself from Aunt Desirée's arms, while she was weeping bitterly. At last Renotte, who was to accompany me, took me in her arms and seated herself with me in the carriage.

My aunt's last charges to her were given in a voice broken with sobs; the driver cracked his whip, and we started. If there had been more room I should have rolled on the floor of the carriage; as it was, I writhed on the cushions in a paroxysm of grief, and then clung to Renotte's arms.

By the time we had reached Daniel Ville I had grown calmer; but with my red eyes, and my cheeks swollen with weeping, I must have presented a most melancholy appearance.

A servant, dressed in a sort of livery, came towards us and looked at our vehicle contemptuously. Aunt Desirée's old yellow coach was certainly anything but beautiful, and the steady mare never varied from the slow and measured pace to which the plough had accustomed her.

As we were entering the yard, Azor jumped from my lap to the ground with the affectionate familiarity of a young dog, who looks on all human beings as his friends. He began to frolic round the servant whom I have mentioned, wagging his tail and barking in delight.

"Get away," cried the man, insolently; "what does that horrid cur come to me for?"

Roughly seizing the dog by the nape of the neck, he threw him a little way off on the grass. I saw and heard all, and telling the driver to stop, I jumped out and began to caress Azor, who, truth to tell, did not seem to feel the worse for the fall. Renotte got out of the carriage with all possible solemnity and joined me. I hung on her arm.

"Renotte," said I, imploringly, "do take Azor

back to Aunt Desirée. He would be unhappy with this cruel man, and he will be a keepsake for her from me."

Renotte promised to do what I wished. She looked at the man with contempt, and we went into the house. At the door we were received by a young and smartly-dressed maid.

Renotte asked for my father. The maid said that urgent business had called him away from home on the previous evening, but that her mistress was impatiently expecting the young lady.

Both Renotte and I were much disconcerted by this news. Renotte had known my father long ago, and his visit to Rosevale the other day had made me feel in some measure as if I could be at home with him. We looked at each other sadly.

"I will show Miss Perceval the way," said the maid; "you can go and rest yourself in the kitchen, my good woman."

My good woman! The idea of this young girl calling Renotte my good woman!

Renotte felt the impertinence of her patronising manner; but Aunt Desirée had impressed on her mind that for my sake, she must not fall out with anyone at Daniel Ville, and she was proceeding towards the kitchen, according to the maid's directions, when, holding fast by her arm, I declared that I would not go without her.

"Besides," said Renotte, in a majestic manner, "my mistress entrusted me with some messages for Mr. Perceval, and as he is not at home I must see the lady."

The young maid-servant muttered some unconnected words, which Renotte did not hear, but amongst which I caught the epithet of "old witch."

As she led us to the presence of her mistress I looked eagerly about me. All the vague memories of my birthplace, which had lingered in my heart, were perplexed by the alterations recently made. After Aunt Desirée's well-ordered but simple home, my father's house appeared to me to be a sort of palace.

But I remembered the long passage on the first floor, and I thought that we must be going to the room which had been my mother's.

. Our guide opened the door, and I went in on Renotte's arm, while her heavy shoes clattered on the polished floor.

I was fairly dazzled by the grandeur of the apartment, with its gorgeous Aubusson carpet, its velvet curtains, and brilliant furniture. A woman was lounging on a sofa; she raised her

head languidly, and a strange smile passed over her lips.

With my present knowledge, I can see that there was cause for that ironical smile; for Renotte and I were certainly ridiculous figures. Renotte was so sallow, so gaunt, and so solemn; and I was so badly dressed, that to see us both holding together as we did was enough to make anyone inclined to laugh.

Taste was not Aunt Desirée's strong point: she was extremely fond of bright colours; and, if memory does not deceive me, I was on that occasion attired in a green poplin frock, a red and black checked shawl, and an immense bonnet, in which two heads like mine could have found room;—this bonnet, moreover, was trimmed with blue ribbons.

Repressing her amusement, my stepmother rose and came forward with the slow, measured gait natural to creoles, and sometimes adopted by other women.

I will draw her picture, not according to my childish judgment of that day, when I considered her very ugly, and thought Renotte far better-looking, but according to my more mature idea formed when I was capable of appreciating her remarkable beauty.

Mrs. Perceval was tall and perfectly well-made, her features were almost too regular. Her complexion was of a kind that lights up well, and is brilliant in youth. The expression of her countenance was cold and proud, and if anything irritated her, her thick eyebrows met and a deep line between them gave her handsome face a harsh and forbidding aspect.

The hard and fixed manner in which she looked at me made me feel an indescribable terror. A little kindness, a gentle smile, an affectionate caress, might at that moment have overcome the germ of aversion which had found place in my heart. But there was nothing to win me. She kissed my forehead so coldly that I hardly felt the touch of her lips. Then she dismissed Renotte by saying, "I expect Mr. Perceval presently; so you can see him."

Renotte seemed stupefied by the haughty tone and by the commanding gesture with which Mrs. Perceval pointed to the open door, and she went away without venturing to embrace me.

I stood looking at her, and feeling much inclined to rush away with her, when my stepmother took me by the hand and led me to a cabinet full of dolls and other toys, and bade me play with them. Then, turning to the maid, who was pretending to arrange the folds of a curtain, she said, in a low voice, "What a dreadful little fright!" and immediately went back to her sofa.

I turned towards her and ventured to look her full in the face. She caught my eye, and asked me why I looked at her so. I answered, angrily, "You said I was a dreadful little fright."

This reproach was received with a loud burst of laughter, in which the maid joined.

Yet more exasperated, and hardly able to restrain the hot tears which were ready to burst forth, I exclaimed: "You are not pretty either. Mamma, my real mamma, was much prettier than you." Had I been ten years older, my revenge could not have founda keener shaft.

She grew red and her eyes flashed with fury.

"She deserves to be punished for such impertinence;—shall I take her away, ma'am?" said the maid.

"Yes, do;—but, no;—to-day it is impossible, but by-and-bye we must see how that temper is to be tamed. I can't think how Mr. Perceval let his child be brought up by that old fool."

I was a dreadful fright, and Aunt Desirée an old fool! It was too much for me; and wounded by this last blow, not in my self-love, but in my

dearest affections, I burst into a fit of weeping. My tears called forth a cruel laugh from my stepmother, and then irritated her. She beckoned the maid to her side, and whispered to her. The maid came to me, put the toys in her apron, and said, harshly, "Come with me."

I obeyed her, and went with her into an adjoining room; she placed the toys again before me, and endeavoured to interest me in them. I took the dolls in my arms, and continued crying, without even looking more at them.

At last she exclaimed, impatiently: "What will your father say to see such a figure? He will think you are just like a Magdalen."

- "I can't help it," I answered, sobbing.
- "Come, won't you play?"
- "No, no!"
- "Look! here are some sugar-plums: your mamma bought them for you. She is so good."

As I could not speak, I shook my head sadly.

"What an obstinate little thing!" muttered my guardian. "What ever can I do with her? Have some sugar-plums, at least;—they will do you good?"

I pushed the bag away. They were not the balm that my wounded heart needed. A caress, a loving word, would have been better; for if I

was, at my worst, much naughtier than other children, I had noble feelings, and even my ordinary troubles could not be allayed by sweetmeats.

Evidently the maid began to feel uneasy at the sight of my passionate sorrow. In vain she sought a remedy, till at last it occurred to her to speak of Renotte.

"She is not gone yet; and if you were good, I would take you out walking with her."

"Take me now," I exclaimed.

"Yes; and have you begin to cry again presently."

"No; when I am with Renotte I wont cry."

"But perhaps you won't keep your word."

"I always keep my word."

"I will go and ask Mrs. Perceval if you may see that woman again;—only don't cry."

She went out of the room, and returned at once. I had, by a violent effort, repressed my tears, but I was still in a deplorable state, for I could not stop trembling and sobbing.

The girl made me wash my hands and face, and when she thought I had sufficiently recovered my composure, she led me to the kitchen.

It was a large kitchen, and Renotte was sitting disconsolate in a corner; her arms were hanging down; she sat stiff and motionless, and looked at everything around with a severe glance.

When she saw me, she rose with a sort of jerk, as if dislodged from her seat by some secret spring, and came to me.

"I am going, by my mistress's desire, to show Miss Perceval the gardens and the park," said the maid;—" will you come with us?"

Without saying a word, Renotte put my arm under her's, as she was wont to do, and we went out. The walk was good for Renotte and for me. We could not say much to each other, for our companion never left us, and we felt that she was a spy watching us; but I had Renotte with me, Azor was frolicking round us, and I was no longer stifled by the heavy perfumed air of the house.

When we came in, I was taken back to Mrs. Perceval, who was reading. I sat down in a corner with a doll, expecting to be called to bid Renotte farewell; but she had been desired to go home without seeing me again, and as it was getting late, she at last started in the old carriage. When I timidly asked to go and say good-bye, I was told that she was gone.

I afterwards heard that Renotte returned to Rosevale, looking very melancholy.

- "And my poor little Gabrielle, how did she get through the journey?" asked Aunt Desirée, who was knitting, and wiping her eyes.
- "She was crying all the way, ma'am, and she was crying at Daniel Ville."
- "Poor child!—And that woman, Renotte, her stepmother?"
 - "She's a hard woman, ma'am?"
- "My goodness! so I heard.—And Mr. Perceval?"

Renotte, at this question, lifted her great hands, and, in the most tragical manner, said: "He is ruining himself."



IV.



FTER supper, of which I could not partake, my stepmother had a fire lighted in her room, and reposed in her arm-

chair, with her eyes fixed on the screen before her.

I was worn out by all that I had gone through during the day, and was beginning to fall asleep, when the tramp of a horse was heard from the yard. Mrs. Perceval started, rose from her seat, and came close to me, saying, in softened tones, "Have you looked at the pretty pictures in this album, Gabrielle?"

"No," was my reply.

"But see how nice they are!" she continued, opening the book and seating herself beside me.

I looked drowsily at the pictures.

"Here," she said, "are some children playing with their hoops;—what dear little girls!"

I gaped.

"And the sheep," proceeded my stepmother,

with a patience so strangely in contrast with her former manner that I could not help feeling somewhat astonished;—"don't they seem to be running across the field?"

The door of the room was gently opened, and my father appeared. He smiled when he saw his charming young wife bending over me; and as he came forward she turned towards him, threw the book aside, and exclaimed: "Here you are at last, Charles! I was almost afraid you would not come home this evening."

My father kissed her and then me, saying: "But for Gabrielle I would have stayed away, Ellen, for I have business twenty miles off for some days to come, and it would have saved me some fatigue; but I wanted to see the child. What is the matter, my darling?" he asked, taking me on his knees;—"you look so sad and dull. Are you sorry to see papa again?"

"Oh, no, papa! I am very glad you have come."

"Then you won't be sad any more, will you? You will be as happy as you were with Aunt Desirée?"

I sighed. He kissed me and put me back in my little chair; then turned to his wife, with whom he talked in a low voice. I heard him say something about feelings that were to be considered; but, consoled by his caresses, I had turned to the picture-book, and found it more entertaining than the conversation.

When eight o'clock struck, Mrs. Perceval rang the bell; the maid came, and was desired to put me to bed, my stepmother remarking that I seemed very tired.

I kissed my father, and was going towards the door when I heard a whisper, and then my father said, in a tone of dissatisfaction, "And your mamma, Gabrielle." I returned, somewhat unwillingly, and presented my forehead to Mrs. Perceval, and then left the room with Madeleine.

She opened a door at the end of the corridor, and I entered a narrow room, furnished luxuriously, like the rest of the house. Madeleine began to undress me as quickly as she could; the bell had interrupted her game of dominoes with Peter, the coachman, and she was in a hurry to resume it.

I let myself be undressed without a word; but when I was in bed, and saw Madeleine take the candle and prepare to leave the room, I asked, in terror, if she was going to leave me alone.

"Certainly," she said. "Do you want me to

look at you going to sleep? I will come back soon; and I sleep in the little room next door. Good-night, Miss."

And deaf to my entreaties, she went away, leaving me in the dark.

To explain the unspeakable fear and misery which at that moment overwhelmed me, I must go back to my mode of life at my aunt's, and to the ideas with which Renotte had filled my infant imagination.

After supper, which was generally over about eight o'clock, Aunt Desirée used to seat herself on a low chair near a cheerful, sparkling fire, and, with her knees apart, wait till I felt inclined to come to her lap. And when I felt that sleep began to weigh down my eyelids I sought that place of rest; she would take off my shoes and stockings, and with my head on the soft pillow of her left arm, and my feet sheltered by her hand from the fire, I slumbered peacefully. But if I were wakeful, or if I asked for a song, Aunt Desirée coughed, and began in a quavering voice an old ballad that she had sung to her late husband for the first time, the day of their betrothal.

When she was out of breath, that is to say, after some five verses, Renotte would begin a

mournful ditty. She did not indulge in runs or shakes, but sang on, on one note, without a pause; her voice was like the croaking of a frog. When Aunt Desirée had taken breath she would continue her ballad, Renotte never interrupting her lament, and five minutes of this extraordinary duet never failed to send me fast asleep.

Then, as I have said, they undressed me, without arousing me, and, in fact, I never remember how I got into bed at Rosevale.

Alas! there were no more caresses, there was no more tender watchfulness for me. Two cold kisses on my forehead, a maid to undress me and leave me alone in a strange room, without light and without a fire.

But, to come to my second cause of misery. Aunt Desirée and Renotte—Renotte, indeed, especially—had a great taste for the supernatural. Aunt Desirée thought the Mysteries of Udolfo the most attractive of literary works, and Renotte was the most superstitious of mortals.

I had often heard them speak of the dead returning to earth, of tokens of coming sorrow, of all manner of things which feed the credulity of simple people. Nevertheless, they would ask each other, "what could have made the little one so timid?"

Timid I certainly was, and at Rosevale I would not have been alone in a room in broad daylight. I need not say more to explain the terror which fell upon me when Madeleine had gone.

I sat up in my bed and cried bitterly while I looked into the darkness with terrified eyes. Then I rolled myself under the bed-clothes and remained huddled up, panting from fright, and with my heart beating as if it would break.

But crying and sobbing brought no one to the rescue. If I had had courage enough to get out of bed I would have run away, but I was transfixed with fear. All Renotte's stories came to my mind; I seemed to be surrounded by ghosts. A ghost was making the bedstead creak, a ghost was rustling the curtains. I curled my legs under me for fear a ghost should take me by my foot—a thing which had happened to a cousin of Renotte's.

At last I was fairly worn out by weeping and by fatigue and lay motionless. It struck me presently that I had not said my prayers, and, folding my hands, I began.

The idea was a happy one. When I thought

of my guardian angel, who, as Aunt Desirée had told me, spread his white wings over me to defend me from evil spirits, and of Our Lady, who looks down with love on sleeping children, my fears were lessened. And the words I repeated had the soothing powers of my aunt's ballad or Renotte's complaint. I fell asleep as "Hail Mary, full of grace!" passed my lips for the tenth time.

In the morning, when I opened my eyes, I called Aunt Desirée, and looked around me in perplexity. The birds were singing under the window, bright patches of sunlight lay on the polished floor, but the good round face of Aunt Desirée did not shine, like another sun, over my bed. My grief had, however, been somewhat exhausted the evening before, and I had no more tears to shed.

Almost as soon as I was awake my door opened and my father came in: he kissed me, and put back my hair, which half covered my face.

"You have slept well, little one—at least so Madeleine says. I wanted to see you before I start. You will be good, my darling, won't you, better than you were yesterday? Your mamma is very fond of you, but you must behave very nicely to her."

"Because I have to go away on business: but I will come back, and I hope to find you so good and obedient. Mamma will give you some lessons. Don't you love her a little already?"

I could not tell stories, so I gave no answer.

"Come," said he, kindly, "don't hide yourself. I see that Aunt Desirée has spoilt you a little; but you really won't be unhappy here;" and so saying, he left me.

No one came to dress me, so I got up and dressed myself as well as I could. I could not hook my apron behind, so I fastened it in front, and everything else was right. The sunshine was most inviting: it was the first time I had ever dressed myself, and as soon as I was ready I went noiselessly downstairs, and, finding a door open, slipped out. At that moment, I confess, I felt comforted. Certainly I had rather been among the cabbage beds and box edgings of the Rosevale garden than in this well-laid-out pleasure-ground, with its unknown flowers and shrubs; but, after all, here I had sunshine and fresh air, and liberty and flowers, and I was but nine years old.

I roamed about a little, looking at everything

[&]quot;Why don't you stay at Daniel Ville, papa?" I asked, quite sadly.

and admiring everything. In the farm-yard all kinds of feathered fowl were strutting about. I looked forward to making friends with these delightful creatures, and getting across a ditch I reached a clover-field.

In a plot surrounded with palings I had seen a beautiful animal, which must, I thought, be like the chamois of some of René's hunting stories. I thought I would, by giving it a little fresh clover, make it tame, and holding my frock, I set to work to gather some.

I had nearly filled my frock, and was going back, when I heard a loud laugh. It was Madeleine, who had been looking for me for half an hour, and seemed much amused by my appearance. When she had done laughing, she scolded me for having gone off by myself, and, without even letting me put down my clover, hurried me to Mrs. Perceval's room.

When I saw her, I remembered my father's words, and with a "Good-morning, mamma," which cost me much, I went up to her to kiss her. But she shrank back, exclaiming, "What a dirty child!—her hands are quite earthy;—and what are these leaves sticking out of her frock? Why do you bring her to me in such a state, Madeleine?"

"I thought, ma'am, it would amuse you to see how she had dressed herself, and what a figure she is. When I went to call her she was gone."

"This is too much, really. Well, we must take our own line. You remember the directions I gave you, Madeleine. And you, Gabrielle, let me have no more running off like a wild colt. You have been brought up like a little henwife, but now we must turn over a new leaf."

I hung my head, and followed Madeleine, wondering what could be the harm of cutting clover for the pretty little kid.

Mrs. Perceval's great mistake regarding me was, that she did not the least understand how necessary it was to proceed gently and gradually in changing all my habits. With a little kindness and affection she would have seen that, having been brought up in the country by my aunt, who idolised me, I could not in a moment adapt myself to a very different mode of life. Even for the sake of my health a little consideration was required. It was impossible suddenly to substitute perfect quietness for the complete freedom and active exercise of my childhood; and the immediate transition from an indulgence bordering on weakness to a strictness amounting to harshness, was most ill-judged. It caused me

much suffering, whether I submitted to this despotic government or rebelled against it. With a high spirit, and a temperament at once sanguine and nervous, revolt was inevitable, and I revolted. But I must not anticipate events.

When I got to my room Madeleine undressed me, and opening a drawer took out a suit of new clothes. I looked with some pleasure at the pretty frock, but my satisfaction was fleeting. Madeleine put on me an instrument of torture called a pair of stays, and began to tighten it. It was in vain for me to say that those hard things hurt me, and that I should not be able to eat or to run about. She had received orders, and she carried them out. When I was dressed I sat down with a feeling of oppression and constraint. It really was very unnecessary to put me to such torture, for I was straight and supple.

Madeleine made me sit at a little table, and my step-mother came and gave me some lessons. I scrawled one or two pages of a copy-book, and when dinner-time came I went to the dining-room. My step-mother attacked me about my stiff carriage and my awkward way of sticking out my elbows, and did not say a kind word during the meal.

When we rose from table I was told that my

recreation that day was to be a walk. But what a walk! A bonnet was put on my head and a veil tied over my face, and I went out, attended by Madeleine. I was silent at first; it seemed to me that they were making me play at being a grown-up lady, and I acted the part. But this did not last long. I put up my veil, and then took off my gloves, and would not be induced to put them on again. In fact I became quite determined, and defied Madeleine.

When we returned to the house she reported my conduct, and I was condemned to go out no more. I had lessons to learn. I closed the book, and while Madeleine was out of the room I took her scissors, cut the stays, successfully extracted the busk, and threw it into the court-yard. This consoled me in some degree, and I withdrew into a bay-window, where I spent most of the afternoon. But I was still very unhappy, and I should have shed bitter tears but for a spirit of opposition which had been unconsciously gaining ground in my wounded heart.

Madeleine did not understand my despair, and while she plied her needle she looked at me furtively, beginning to think that I was not quite in my right mind. I paid no heed to her presence, but gazed out of the window. If it only had

been a wet day! but the sun shone brilliantly, the sky was blue, the breeze murmured in the poplar-trees, and unfolded their tender leaves. A pair of magpies were building a nest in one of these trees, and it was some little comfort to me to watch their various movements.

The male bird flew about with an air of business, and often brought back in his beak a little stick for the nest. The fabric thickened, and gradually grew round. How hard they worked! The female generally came from the top of the tree, where the nest was placed, down to the lower branches; she twisted off little dead twigs and returned to her attic. Once in the nest, nothing could be seen of her save the end of a glossy black tail. The wind got up, and the young poplar-tree rocked to and fro, the nest and the magpies swinging with it; but the airy dwelling was uninjured, and bore the graceful movements of the tree in perfect security.

"Happy little magpies!" thought I to myself; "if you were prisoners, you would not chatter and hop about so joyously."

Evening came. I was harshly scolded by Mrs. Perceval for not knowing a word of my lessons, and then put to bed, after a supper of dry bread, served to me on a beautiful Sèvres china plate.

This was one way of getting rid of me. I made no complaint, though my door was locked, lest I should escape. It was still broad daylight. I did not even try to sleep. I began to think, and never were my reflections more serious. I was unhappy: that was the subject of consideration.

The fate of Tom Thumb in the giant's den, that of Cinderella with her unkind sisters, and that of the beauty in the enchanted wood, were all compared with mine, and I had no hesitation in deciding that mine was the hardest. father was away and could not defend me; and although Mrs. Perceval had not said that she would eat me, she put me in prison, made me eat dry bread, and never kissed me. My little brain was hard at work, and I seriously considered how I could escape from my stepmother's power and return to Aunt Desirée. All at once it occurred to me that I might write to my aunt. As soon as this bright idea struck me, I began to carry it out. I got quietly out of bed, and, putting on my petticoat, went to the table, took a large sheet of paper, and wrote a rough copy. By some chance it has been preserved, and it is as follows :--

"MY DEAR AUNT,

"Come quickly for me, or send Renotte, for I have been crying ever since I came to Daniel Ville." (At the moment my eyes were perfectly dry, but there was enough of truth to justify the general assertion.) "They say no prayers here; they are all bad. I have no coffee in the morning, and no fire in the evening, and I never, never go out of this horrid house. Do you know, aunt, if you leave me at Daniel Ville I shall soon be dead, and that will make you and Renotte and Azor very sorry."

This seemed to me conclusive; and as I had spent some time in writing these lines, and was afraid of being interrupted, I said no more, but began to make a fair copy. I folded my fresh sheet carefully, endeavouring to make it as like a letter as possible, and then I wondered how to address it. All those letters of Aunt Desirée's had something written on the outside;—but I wrote so badly.

At last I made a venture, and wrote, in large letters: "To Aunt Desirée." Then I hid the letter and the rough copy under my pillow, and went back to bed.

The letter was written, but how was it to

reach my aunt? I had an instinctive conviction that if I gave it to anyone at Daniel Ville, the chances were that it would never arrive at Rosevale.

I could not think what was to be done, and so I went to sleep, and dreamt that a white pigeon, with a pink ribbon round its neck, took my letter in its beak; and that Aunt Desirée and Renotte, transformed for the time being into two beautiful horses, were harnessed to the yellow chariot, and came to fetch me. I seemed to be travelling most of the night. One of the horses had on its head a cap with green ribbons, like Aunt Desirée's, and the other a stiff-starched high cap, like Renotte's; but at this point I was suddenly awakened: Madeleine was shaking me by the arm.

"Come!" she said, "get up; it is seven o'clock, and we are going to town this morning."

"What! am I going, Madeleine?" said I, rubbing my eyes.

"Yes; we are going on your account; the dressmaker is to try on your frock, and the milliner your bonnet."

I got up with alacrity, not for the sake of the frock or the bonnet, but because I saw a chance of sending my letter. The postman always came

from the town, so no doubt the letters must start from town. I let myself be dressed without any difficulty, and started with Madeleine, not having seen my stepmother, who was still asleep.

On the way I tried, as cleverly as I could, to elicit from Madeleine some information that might serve my purpose. Hitherto, I had been as open and frank as a child could be; I simply asked Aunt Desirée anything I wanted to know, I candidly confessed to her any little fault I committed, and my life had never been sullied by a falsehood.

But the harshness shown me was leading me to cunning and dissimulation. Being weak, I felt that I could only struggle after the manner of the weak, that is, by opposing craftiness to force.

I therefore asked Madeleine, in the most innocent manner, who that man was who passed by, wearing a blue blouse and a cap with red binding.

Madeleine liked being in the carriage, with Peter as coachman, and she answered, pleasantly enough, that he was the postman.

"But," I inquired, "where does he get the letters to put in the little box on his back?"

"From the post-office, of course."

"And where is the post-office?"

Madeleine had no great stock of patience, and was sure to cut short my questions by a harsh word. I had a foreboding of this, and applied to the coachman: "Where is the post-office, Peter?"

"In town," answered Madeleine, quickly;—
"where else could it be?"

"What is the post-office like?"

"The little one is curious," said Peter, laughing. "If you don't know how to answer her, Madeleine, I will."

"No, no," said Madeleine; "I know the post-office; and since you ask what it is like, Miss Gabrielle, I will tell you that it is an office full of gentlemen. The mail bags bring letters and take them away, and the letters for the town and the neighbourhood are delivered by the postmen."

"Then you put papa's letters in this office?"

"No; there is a box in the street—indeed, there are several boxes. You put the letter in the hole."

"And who takes it out?"

"Why, the postmen. If it is in a letter-box, they take it to the post-office, and then it is sent to its address."

After this explanation, I asked no more questions, for I was afraid that Madeleine might suspect something; but as soon as I got out of the carriage, I looked carefully in every direction.

We passed through several streets before I could see anything at all like the letter-box that Madeleine had described. At last, in the middle of a wall which enclosed a large and dull-looking house, I saw a box built into the mason-work and surmounted by something made of tin, which seemed hollow. I took my letter, and ran on a few steps in front of Madeleine, as if I wished to look at a little statue which stood over the box.

I looked at it for some moments; and as soon as Madeleine had passed by, I raised myself on a stone which lay under the way, and with some difficulty pushed my letter into the opening in the box. Then I ran gaily after Madeleine. I had carried out my plan; Aunt Desirée would soon know all; my troubles were now at an end.

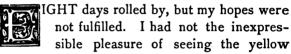
But to ensure this happy result my letter required a more complete address than merely "To Aunt Desirée." And in the second place, it ought to have been put in a letter-box,

instead of in the alms-box of a charitable institution.

I never pass that little statue of St. Joseph without smiling at the thought of the memorable day when I consigned my first letter to an almsbox.



٧.



chariot arrive, and I thought that Aunt Desirée had given me up. Mrs. Perceval continued her severe and repressive treatment. She found Daniel Ville extremely dull, and I fancy that what she termed the reformation of my character afforded her some satisfaction.

I became morose and sad, and no one who saw me sitting shut up in the room assigned to me could have imagined that some few days before I was bright and happy as a bird.

My most innocent pleasures were condemned, every noisy game was absolutely forbidden. The toys which were put before me did not satisfy me. I would have given all the dolls for the chance of sailing a nut-shell on a brook, and all the wooden animals for a quarter of an hour

with the captive chamois. I loved real, living, moving nature, and the best imitation did not touch my heart.

My only real pleasure during that long week was derived from the society of a little red beetle, one of the species that lives and dies on the lily.

To possess it was a happiness. I put it in a little box with a glass lid, and rejoiced in seeing it run over the leaves which I gathered for it in my play-time.

The little creature was my inseparable companion; at night it was hid at the foot of my bed, and its days were spent in the pocket of my apron.

I had but one anxiety, and that was that the beetle might want more fresh air; and one day I unhappily decided to give it air while I was at my lessons with Mrs. Perceval. I took the box gently out of my pocket, and holding it under the table, raised the lid. But my stepmother saw in my face an expression of unaccountable delight; and as I looked down at the insect unfolding its scarlet wings, she asked me what I was looking at.

Her harsh tone frightened me, and, blushing as red as the beetle, I answered, "At nothing."

"Put your hands on the table," said Mrs. Perceval.

I trembled, but did as I was told, without venturing to shut the box which lay on my lap.

My stepmother continued her explanation of my lesson; but I hardly heard a word, I was so occupied about the poor little creature. It surely would get out of its prison. Where would it go, and how should I find it again? If even it had sense to go away without being seen, I might bear it; but insects are so foolish, perhaps it would crawl on an unfriendly dress.

My stepmother was irritated by my evident inattention. She got up and came near me. I moved my chair hastily, and the box slipped down on the floor at her feet.

"You cunning little thing!" she said, with anger. "So that is what you were playing with; and you told me a lie a moment ago. My goodness! what is that beast?"

For the poor beetle had fallen on its back, and its legs were whirling in the air.

I saw her take one step and raise her foot. I threw myself before her, with clasped hands and tearful eyes, and implored her not to kill it, promising that I would be very good. But she shrugged her shoulders, and coolly put the heel

of her boot on the unfortunate animal. There was a little crack, and it was crushed.

This cruelty enraged me. I cried and stamped. All her threats failed to quiet me. She commanded me to go back to my room, but I rebelled and refused to stir.

Then she seized me by my two hands and dragged me into a lumber-room near at hand. My feet knocked against the furniture, and my head was bruised. The pain only increased my rage, which was now past control.

She let me roll on the floor, and went away, locking the door; but soon returned with the coachman, who brought a hammer and some nails.

"Nail up the window, Peter," said Mrs. Perceval; "there is no saying what this horrid child might do."

Peter obeyed.

"Is that secure?" asked she.

"Yes, ma'am," said Peter.

"Very well. Now, Miss Gabrielle, you will stay eight days shut up here, without coming out. Do you understand that?"

At this fearful threat, I rose to my feet. A word occurred to my mind, and I immediately hurled it at her.

"Stepmother! stepmother!" I called out, amid my sobs.

A burst of loud laughter was the only answer to my attack; the key turned in the lock, and I fell back on the floor, worn out and breathless.

I spent several hours in a sort of stupor, from which I was at length roused by Mrs. Perceval's voice.

Ever since I had been at Daniel Ville, a struggle between good and evil feelings had been going on within me. Hitherto the good had gained the day. I had suffered much from the constraint imposed on me, and from the coldness and indifference with which I had been treated, but I had till this day been submissive and quiet.

This last scene, however, had wrought on my nerves, and had awakened all the opposition of my nature. Suddenly I made up my mind to return evil for evil, and my little head was full of plans of rebellion.

I rose up, bruised, worn out, and changed, and went to the window. I tried to open it, for I had a craving for air. On other occasions, if I had been shut up in my room, I had at least been able to open the window, and had felt but half imprisoned. I shook the casements in vain:

they were firmly fastened. My forehead and eyes were burning.

To make matters worse, I heard Mrs. Perceval talking and laughing; I saw her sauntering along a walk, leading by a silken cord her favourite little King-Charles spaniel.

"She has shut me up," said I to myself; "and her dog can see the sun, and feel the grass under its feet; and I, with my hot eyes, have to stay behind this horrid window. I will break it."

And I clenched my fists; but I had on different occasions cut my hands with broken glass, and I thought twice about running such a risk. Looking round the room, I saw in one corner an old worn-out umbrella; I seized it and shattered a pane of glass, knocked away all the pieces that remained in the groove, and finally knelt on a chair and put my head out of the window.

Mrs. Perceval, who had heard the noise, came to see what it was. She looked at me in amazement, and beneath her veil I saw her dark eyebrows scowl.

She said not a word, but hastily left the flower-garden. In a quarter of an hour a manservant, whose name I did not know, came, took me in his arms, and, spite of my resistance, carried me to the other end of the house, where I

had never been before. The outer shutters were fastened, and I was left alone in the dark.

I must confess that my sensibility was somewhat blunted. I had a high spirit; I had now made up my mind to resist; I was not going to complain. But I thought that it was impossible to live in a house which was turned into a prison, and with people who did not love me and whom I hated. Again I determined to escape, and to go back to Aunt Desirée.

I might have to pass through gloomy forests; I should, no doubt, be attacked by wicked dogs and beaten by rude boys;—but that made no difference.

At mid-day my dinner was brought to me; in the evening Madeleine came and put me to bed, without saying a word to me. The next morning I got up early, and when I went back to my dark prison I secretly took some clothes with me.

When I was alone I made them into a bundle, tying it up with one of my garters. My baggage was light, and, truth to tell, ill chosen. I had not taken anything that could be of use to me: in fact, I had opened the press and hastily seized anything trimmed with lace or ribbon. I sat on my bundle to hide it from other eyes, and I

spent a great part of the day in pondering on my escape.

Madeleine brought me some food, and it was in vain that I besought her not to lock the door. She laughed at me, and told me I must have patience, as my stepmother had decided to keep me in prison till the day my father came back.

Four o'clock came; no way of escape yet appeared. I put a bit of bread into my bundle, between a collar and an embroidered handkerchief, and I began to walk round and round the room, like a young wolf in a cage.

There was only one door, and that was fast shut. My heart was heavy, and I sat down hopelessly, when all at once it was opened, and Madeleine came back.

- "I have begged Mrs. Perceval to forgive you," she said, hastily; "and this once she will. Go and thank her."
 - "No," said I, determinedly; "she is too bad."
- "What an obstinate little girl! You want to stay in prison, then?"
 - "No, no!" cried I; "I want to come out."
- "Well, then, go where you will; Mrs. Perceval has given leave."
 - "And the doors are all open?"
 - " Certainly."

"You won't keep me?"

"No; you are allowed to run where you like." I jumped for joy.

"But don't go too far," added Madeleine.
"Mrs. Perceval has had a message to say that your father is coming back; and if you are a mile away when he comes back, don't expect me to run after you."

I thought that I would be much more than a mile away, safe with Aunt Desirée; but I said not a word. Madeleine went, leaving the door open. I lost no time in taking advantage of the liberty granted me, and with my bundle under my arm went into the garden. At the end of the garden was a gate leading into the fields. I went through this gate, and ran as fast as I could for a quarter of an hour; then I stopped, thinking I must have gone an immense distance, and afterwards I proceeded more slowly, anxiously looking out for the poplar-trees of the Rosevale avenue. When I felt tired I sat down on a grassy bank; and soon I was asleep, with my head resting on the packet. By-and-by a feeling of cold aroused me; I opened my eyes; it was almost dark. I had never thought of the chance of being benighted. I got up shivering, and began to run straight on, hardly able to keep

back my tears. In my distress I looked for a house where I might find shelter, and at last I saw one with smoke rising from its chimneys. I turned my steps towards it, passed through a courtyard, and entered a great kitchen, where the evening meal was being prepared. A great many people were in the kitchen, and I stood in a dark corner, not knowing what to say for myself. Then a man, who seemed to me very old, left the group of peasants, passed close to me without seeing me, and opened a door on the left. Through the open door I saw him go and sit down in an old arm-chair at the chimneycorner: then he turned to some one whom I could not see, and said: "Give me my pipe, nephew." A little boy came to him. With a cry of delight, I rushed into the room, for I saw it was René.

"It is Gabrielle, uncle," exclaimed René, taking me by the hand and leading me to the old gentleman, without further ceremony.

"Are you alone, my child?" said he, kindly.

I told him of my escape from Daniel Ville.

"What a brave little girl!" said Mr. Du Bressy, René's uncle, to a third person, who came into the room as I finished my story. "But we can't keep you, child."

"Then take me to Aunt Desirée, sir," I prayed.

"Nothing I should like better, for—hem—hem—but you see it is not possible;—what would your father say?"

"Who is this little girl, Felix?" asked the second old gentleman.

"It is Gabrielle," cried René, introducing me again.

"A strange expression came over the face of the elder of the two uncles; his grey eyebrows frowned angrily, and he looked at me with a severe glance.

"Perceval's daughter?" he observed, in a voice which made me shrink back, it was so like the voice which Renotte gave to the ogres in her stories.

"Yes," said his brother; "she has run away from Daniel Ville in fear and hatred of her stepmother, who is not at all fond of her, it seems."

Mr. Francis continued to look at me so hard that I began to be frightened. Then all at once his face grew gentle; spite of my objections, he took me in his arms and kissed me. Then, turning to Mr. Felix, remarked: "I should have known her from her likeness to——." He coughed and seemed unable to pronounce the

name; then continued: "Her eyes, especially, poor child!"

Mr. Felix went away; and having slidden out of his brother's arms, I joined René in a corner where he was cleverly arraying his fishingtackle. He condescended to accept my assistance.

When Mr. Felix returned, he took me on his knees. "I have just sent a message to your father, my little lady," he said, "to ask him to let you spend the night here; but perhaps he will send for you. Anyhow, you will have supper with us."

"I won't go back to Daniel Ville, sir," said I, decidedly.

"We will ask Perceval to let you go to Rosevale," said the elder Mr. Du Bressy.

The hope satisfied me, and I became gay and talkative. René proposed that we should play at horses in the drawing-room. I agreed, and it was pleasant enough; for the floor was not polished, and no one was continually calling out, "Take care! take care!"

René's two uncles watched us, and enjoyed our pleasure. These rough, weather-beaten, bearded faces seemed to me much more genial than my stepmother's beautiful features; and by the time supper was over we were the best friends in the world.

I jumped on their knees, I took the pipe out of their lips to kiss them, and Mr. Felix went into fits of laughter when I put a bridle on René, and drove him on all-fours round the room. But the sound of wheels interrupted the evening's merriment.

A servant came in and gave a letter to the younger Mr. Du Bressy, whom René used to call "my uncle, the hunter."

"You are sent for, little fairy," said he, "and you must go;—but you will come back, do you understand? I must have you come back."

I ran behind Mr. Francis. "I won't go to Daniel Ville;—defend me!" said I.

He put his great rough hand on my head, in token of protection. "Can't we keep her this evening, Felix?" he asked.

But his brother gave him the letter, and they spoke in a low voice together for a moment. Mr. Felix then took me by the hand and told me that I must go, promising that I should come back every Thursday, and go out fishing with his brother and René.

"And I will make you a pretty little line, with an artificial fly, Gabrielle," added Mr. Francis, his voice becoming strangely gentle as he pronounced the name.

But I could not bear the idea of going back to Daniel Ville.

"Perhaps," suggested René, in a low voice, "they have been told to drive you back to Rosevale."

This little deception, from which the uncles had shrunk, overcame my objections, and I let myself be placed in the carriage.

"You are going to take me to Aunt Desirée's, are not you?" I asked the servant.

He smiled and held down his head. René had entreated him not to undeceive me; so I kissed my hands repeatedly to the nephew and uncles, and threw myself back in the carriage, saying to the coachman: "Don't mistake the way in the dark. Aunt Desirée will give you a great deal of money."

I fell asleep, sure that I should waken at -Rosevale.



VI.

HEN I awoke I was in the drawing-room at Daniel Ville, on a sofa which had been placed near the fire. Mrs. Perceval was opposite to me. I was bitter disappointed; but fearing reproof and punish ent, I closed my eyes again, and did not open them even when I heard the opening of a door and the footsteps of a man.

"Has Gabrielle not wakened yet?" asked a voice, which I recognised as my father's.

"No," replied Mrs. Perceval; "it would have been better to put her to bed at once, I assure you, Charles."

"You think so, numbed with cold as she was? I am very sorry to say it, Ellen, but you really do not at all understand the care that children require." My father's tone of voice was almost severe. "We must decide something," he went on to say. "You tell me the child does not love

you, and her running away proves it plainly. I don't see how you are to live together."

"I confess, Charles, that I am unable to bend her haughty nature, or to conquer her obstinacy."

"Ellen! Ellen! you do not understand children. Their love must be won by indulgence and affection. Gabrielle fears you, and, with a temper like hers, fear leads to hatred. At any cost, you ought to have gained her heart: all would then have been easy. Have you shown all the prudence and tenderness that were needed? I do not think you have, and yet you promised that you would."

"Could I imagine that your daughter, a child of eight years old, would be what I find her? Did I know that she would be so stubborn and impertinent?"

"And have you not been hard towards her?"
There was a moment's silence, and my father added: "I cannot tell you how unhappy this makes me. How will it be by-and-by, if even now you two cannot bear each other?"

"But she will change; she must change; I love her, though she is a naughty child. Is she not your daughter; and when I married you, did not I become her mother?"

- "You have the name of mother, certainly;—but a separation is necessary. I will send her back to my aunt."
- "To have everyone say it is my fault. You won't do that, Charles?"
- "Is it not very natural that she should return to the one who has brought her up?"
- "Then she ought never to have left her. Now people will say that I dislike my stepdaughter, and have turned her out of her father's house. Charles, the idea is dreadful. Oh! I was told that a stepmother had a hard part to play: if only I had known."
- "But, in the name of goodness, what would you have me do with my child, Ellen?" asked my father, in a tone which had lost its decision.
- "Send her to school: it is quite time that her education should be attended to. The convent where my sister is being brought up is not far off, and Sara is very happy there. You know it as well as anyone, since you are good enough to go every quarter and pay the bill. Gabrielle would get on very well there."
- "I promised her mother that I would never part with her," murmured my father.
- "Yet you have let her spend four years with her aunt."

"Yes; but I knew she was loved and cared for there. When Gabrielle asked me to keep my child with me, it was to make sure of her not being handed over to the indifference of strangers."

"I wanted to have Sara with me, and when you asked me to part from her, I made no difficulty about it."

"The case is not the same: Sara is only your sister."

"And don't you think she would have been a pleasant companion for me in this dull country place, where you have shut me up, and where I see nobody?"

"You said so much about your love of the country before our marriage, that I never expected such a reproach from you."

"It is not a reproach, Charles; but our only neighbours here are two rough old bachelors, and you are always away. I did not look forward to such loneliness."

"And therefore I did not wish Gabrielle to be away from you."

"Her temper makes your idea impossible. When she has been at the convent for a few months, perhaps she will be more manageable, and then we will have her with us."

"It is settled, then; she must try it," said my father, with a sigh. "To-morrow I will take her to St. Mary's;—but there is no use in saying anything about it to her to-night. Pray, have her put to bed."

In answer to the bell, Madeleine appeared and carried me off to bed.

I was much afraid of being again by myself in my little room, but my father had given directions that I was not to be left alone that night.

In the morning he came to my room early, while I was being dressed. Then we had breakfast, and he asked me if I was ready. I answered that I was, and he ordered the carriage; a trunk containing my clothes was put on it, and he led me to my stepmother. Much to his surprise, she was tying her bonnet-string, and Madeleine was wrapping a warm cloak round her shoulders.

"How surprised you look, Charles," said she.
"Is there anything strange in my taking this opportunity of going into the town to do some shopping?"

"Certainly not;—but how will you come back?"

"I will wait for your return, or perhaps, if it continues fine, I will come with you to St.

Mary's. I should like to beg the Reverend Mother to take care of Gabrielle, and also to see Sara, who writes me little letters full of reproaches."

"It is very cold, I warn you. There is quite an icy wind this morning."

"No colder for me than for you, Charles;—and really, your business so often calls you away from Daniel Ville that you need not wonder that I should wish to accompany you to St. Mary's, even if I had no other reason for going there."

Evidently Mrs. Perceval had determined not to leave me and my father alone together; she was afraid that in her absence I might tell him of all that she had made me suffer.

We started, and when we arrived at the town she seemed doubtful whether she would go further or not. My father appeared irritated; and suddenly she made up her mind, threw herself back in the carriage, and said, languidly: "Let us start, Charles; I will do my commissions another time."

Pierre touched the horses, and we proceeded. The country through which we were passing was new to me, and I amused myself by looking about me, paying no attention to the conversation

between my father and his wife, which was anything but lively.

I was going to the convent, but the word conveyed no definite idea to my mind. Certainly I should not be worse off than I had been at Daniel Ville. I felt neither pleasure nor pain on hearing that the houses I saw at the bottom of the valley formed the town in which I was to live.

The carriage stopped at an hotel, and we walked to the convent. My heart was oppressed at the sight of this gloomy building, of which the windows looking on the street were barred.

A lay-sister brought us into a parlour, and the Reverend Mother soon appeared: she was a tall, striking-looking woman. I watched her with a certain fear while she was speaking to my father. A strange idea occurred to my mind: I thought that perhaps I should have to wear a coif and veil, a habit with heavy folds, a blue cotton apron, and a crucifix; so when the Reverend Mother drew near to kiss me, I clung to my father, exclaiming: "Oh, papa! I won't be a nun; I don't want a black veil."

"You shall not have one, my child," said the Reverend Mother, gently; "and you will be very happy here." Then she turned to a laysister, and told her to call Miss Sara Blondet.

In a few minutes a child about my own age, but much smaller than I was, came into the parlour.

Mrs. Perceval's mother was English, and Sara was a lovely little girl of the English type, with long, fair, curling hair, blue eyes, and rosy cheeks. She kissed Mr. and Mrs. Perceval, and in obedience to her sister came to kiss me, too.

Mrs. Perceval looked at us with an air of triumph; and when I recall the expression of her countenance, I cannot help thinking that she was, in her own mind, making a comparison between her sister and me—a comparison, I need hardly add, little to my advantage.

"Sara," said the Reverend Mother, "take your new companion to the play-ground."

I looked at my father; he kissed me, and bid me go with his little sister-in-law.

We left the parlour together, and she led me into a large court, planted with stunted trees. The wind was rough and harsh, and had driven the girls into the play-room; so we only crossed the court and proceeded to a large room, full of little girls of various ages.

Sara now ran off to resume the game which had been interrupted; but the nun in charge took pity on me; and leaving the youngest children, for whom she had been cutting out crosses and hearts in pink paper, came to me and brought me to sit by her side. The bigger girls were grouped together at a little distance, and after looking at me from head to foot, they continued to listen to a story which one of them was relating.

"The king had two daughters," said the speaker; "one was called Beauty, and the other Ugly Puss."

"Like the new girl," said a mocking voice, and all eyes were directed to me.

"What is her name?" asked several of the children.

"Ugly Puss, I told you already," said the mischievous one, regardless of my angry look.

The nun now interfered, told them my name distinctly, and strictly forbid such jokes; but the name fitted me, and it stuck to me.

I was deeply wounded. After all, my stepmother was not wrong in calling me a fright when I first arrived at Daniel Ville. I had so often heard Aunt Desirée and Renotte call me pretty, that I was quite unconscious of my plainness, and these reproaches seemed absolutely unjust. I resented the injury inflicted on me, and was sulky all the rest of the day.

But I could not help owning to myself that this great house was not the dreary place that I had imagined. Under the square coifs of the nuns, I found kindly faces, and I was in no danger of suffering from solitude. I was put in the same dormitory as Sara, who, truth to tell, took no notice of me, and I was one of the last to go to sleep. My eyes were never weary of gazing on the rows of little white beds, in which appeared rosy faces, surrounded with fair or brown locks. The dormitory was well closed in, and a lamp burned in it all night. I fell asleep, having made up my mind that, since it was impossible to get back to my bed at Rosevale, I was not too badly off at St. Mary's.



VII.



Y fears were at an end. The convent seemed to me a very tolerable place of abode, yet for some days I was silent, gloomy, and froward.

A comparison will throw light on the cause of this strange persistency, so unlike the changeful and impressionable temper of childhood.

Have you ever observed the effects of transplantation on young trees? The nursery garden is generally a chosen, fertile spot: the sun shines on it, and the dew refreshes it. Take a plant from this favoured ground and put it in an exposed situation with an unkindly soil, and you will see that it suffers from the change, and that the sap, which is its life, appears to fail. You hasten to place it in more favourable circumstances; with shelter and a good aspect it will recover, but slowly; for some of its roots are dead and others are feeble. My case was like that of this tree. I had been brought up in the full sunshine of affection, and then transplanted to a cold region of indifference, egotism, and malignity. I had suffered cruelly, and now, though I was in a happy place of shelter, I needed time to let my soul regain confidence.

During the first week I did not work regularly at lessons. My sadness and dulness disquieted the Reverend Mother; she had a great deal of penetration, and she divined the cause, therefore at first, for the sake of my health, I was exempted from the school-routine, my recreations were long, and I was allowed to stray at will through the convent grounds. This was the only real remedy for my depression, and it soon produced the desired result. I played alone for the most part, but certainly I played, and the small amount of study which was imposed on me was conscientiously accomplished.

A week after my arrival, I was told that the quarterly rewards were to be distributed. My best frock was put on, and I went with the others into the recreation-room. Some priests were there, and several ladies.

The little girls came first. My heart beat fast, and I looked at my pretty frock, fearing that I should not have a chance of exhibiting it on the

platform, where the rewards were being distributed. But to my great joy my name resounded through the large room—a prize was given to me by way of encouragement. I grew crimson with delight, and went to receive the prize, which consisted of a picture.

I had regained my active, lively step, and I was returning to my place in triumph, when, just as I passed two ladies, I heard one of them say: "Do look at that ugly, conceited little girl!"

I looked round, wondering which of my companions the lady could mean; but no one was near, and the lady addressed was looking at me. I hung my head in confusion at this new affront, and during the rest of the proceedings I was dull and sad.

Ugly! ugly! how the word wounded my childish self-love to the quick. It changed that day completely to my mind. During the recreation I hid myself in a corner of the garden and refused to join in the sports of my companions. They left me to myself, but as they passed by the ill-natured ones cast a harsh word, or an unkind glance at me.

I was beginning to lose all patience, when one of my companions—the very one who had made

fun of me the day of my arrival—came up suddenly, and with a burst of laughter shouted, "Ugly Puss!" Childhood is very pitiless!

I started up in a rage, and seizing a clod of earth, threw it with all my strength and skill at my persecutor. It hit her full in the face. She cried out; the others gathered round; her nose was bleeding. The sight calmed my anger; I cried more bitterly than she did, and for fear of seeing her die on the spot, I ran away, absolutely hating myself.

I ran across an artichoke-plot, and hid my misery behind a great gooseberry-bush, against which I leant. I heard many voices call me by name; a search was being made for me, and one of the nuns passed very near to me. I did not dare to move, but it was not only fear that kept me back; this evil action was my first, and I was very sorry for it.

In a few moments I saw one of my little schoolfellows coming along the path; I soon perceived that it was Sara. She was walking slowly, and looking about her cautiously. When she came to my gooseberry-tree she parted the branches, our eyes met, and she started back.

"Don't be afraid, Sara," said I, sadly; "I have not got anything to throw at you."

"I am not frightened, Gabrielle," she answered.
"I see you are sorry; I will show you that I am not afraid."

And she made her way through the gooseberrybushes and came close to me.

"Is Lucy dead?" I asked, in a trembling voice, and with fresh sobs.

"No; but you must come and beg her pardon. Everyone is looking for you, and our mothers are uneasy, for the gardener left the little door open, and they thought you had gone away through it. Come along."

I let her lead me to the class-room, where all the pupils were assembled; the nuns looked very grave. When I appeared, one of them, observing my face of misery, went up to the Reverend Mother, and whispered something to her. The Reverend Mother made a sign of assent, and pointing towards Lucy, whose red and swollen nose was a keen reproach to me, said:—

"What had your companion done to provoke such unpardonable violence on your part, my child?"

"She called me 'Ugly Puss,' Reverend Mother; but I am far the naughtiest to have hit her." And I covered my face with my pocket handkerchief, which was soaked with tears.

"You were very wrong, Lucy," answered the Reverend Mother; "and if Gabrielle had not taken the law into her own hands, I should have had to punish you for such a want of charity. As for you, Gabrielle, I need not tell you that you have done a very bad action;—you feel it yourself: We had meant to separate you from your companions for some days, but Mother St. Louis has begged that you may be forgiven, and your own conscience will be your only punishment. Kiss Lucy, and make a good resolution not to give way to passion any more."

Lucy kissed me with a bad grace, and I followed Mother St. Louis, to whom I owed my pardon. She took me to her cell, showed me how great my fault had been, and her gentle counsel made more impression on me than any punishment could have done. If I had been shut up, or put on bread and water, I should have looked on the account as settled; but left to my own reflections, I felt that I could not blame myself enough for my act of violence.

Mother St. Louis had, no doubt, guessed all this; and from that day she showed the deepest interest in me. If I had at once been put under her care, I think that I should have entered on a period of goodness; but she was one of the most gifted among the nuns, and directed the most advanced classes. We met, however, from time to time, and the sight of her thin, pale face, with its serene expression, its piercing yet gentle eyes, its delicate black eyebrows, which contrasted so well with the white coif, always made me calm and docile.

But indeed the influence of Mother St. Louis was felt by us all in different degrees: we yielded to it we knew not why.

Among the nuns there were tall and beautiful women, who wore the black veil with a kind of majesty, and yet no one of them all inspired the same reverence as did Mother St. Louis, with her slight, fragile form, and her pale face, her humble mien and downcast eyes.

At the evening recreation I met my little consoler, who, although younger than I was, had made much greater progress in learning.

The day had been to me an eventful one, and after having joined in a game for the sake of pleasing my companions, I went away by myself to consider all that had happened. In the middle of the garden was a little basin of water; I sat down on the stone that surrounded it, and looked at the reflection of myself within. Alas! no better moment could have been chosen to con-

vince me that Lucy had made no mistake in calling me plain. My eyelids were red, my nose was swollen, my complexion coarse; in fact, I was extremely ugly. Why could I not have beautiful hair like Sara's, a delicate skin, and a little nose? A little nose especially? As I asked myself this question, Sara's face appeared in the limpid water.

"What are you doing there, Gabrielle?" she asked.

I was a little ashamed of being caught in the very act of examining my personal appearance; but Sara had been so kind to me that I did not mind confessing my weakness to her, and I answered: "I am looking at the little girl in the water, the one that everybody calls plain Puss."

And as she turned towards me with surprise, I told her the morning's adventure, which she had but half known. She was horrified, and looking at me attentively, said: "But you are not ugly; I am sure your eyes are larger than mine."

And taking the end of her black alpaca apron, she measured my right eye, and then her own, and presently pronounced them to be of exactly the same size.

[&]quot;But my nose," I remarked, sadly.

Sara looked at it, and even felt it. "If only it were thinner," she said, and holding it delicately between her thumb and first finger, she studied the effect of the pressure applied. "Does that hurt you?" she asked.

"No," replied I, in a nasal tone;—"but how oddly it makes me speak!"

At that moment we were summoned. I hid my face in my hands, muttering sorrowfully: "They will laugh at me again when we go to lessons."

"Never mind," said Sara, gently;—"and, above all, don't look cross; that is the only thing that makes you ugly, and so the girls try to vex you, all for fun."

I resolved to follow this good little bit of advice, and from that day my life at St. Mary's was a happy one.



VIII.

HE life of a child, especially that of a school-girl, does not furnish many interesting events to record, so I will pass rapidly over the next few years.

I must confess, that my family took little notice of me during this period. Once every three months my father or Madeleine used to come to see me. Renotte came more frequently, being sent by my Aunt Desirée, whose rheumatism and excessive stoutness made it impossible for her to leave home. When Madeleine came I saw her for a few minutes, but when Renotte appeared, I begged to spend all my recreation with her.

Each of the women carried away a very different report of me.

"Miss Gabrielle is very well, ma'am," Madeleine would say, primly; "she is as red as a peony;—but, oh, so ugly!—quite a monster, especially

compared with Miss Sara, who is as beautiful as Venus."

Madeleine liked reading, and used to glance over the novels which formed Mrs. Perceval's study, hence this classical allusion. On Renotte's return from St. Mary's, Aunt Desirée would ask: "Well, how is our little Gabrielle?" "Very well, ma'am," Renotte would say, seriously. "She is as tall as an oak-tree, and as fresh as a rosebud. I think she grows prettier than ever."

"I don't wonder, Renotte; she is a lovely child, and will be a beautiful woman. She is very like her uncle, who was such a handsome man."

Before the end of my first year at the convent I heard from Sara that Mr. and Mrs. Perceval were going to live in Paris. My father came to take leave of me before their departure. He seemed out of spirits, and his evident dejection made me imagine many dreadful things about my step-mother.

Edith, a friend of mine, who was going to make her First Communion, often said that, as God never refused anything children asked on that occasion, she would beg for the recovery of a little brother who had been an invalid for years. I resolved that, when the time came, I would ask God to take Mrs. Perceval very soon, because she made my father unhappy and had treated me so unkindly.

As my father was leaving Daniel Ville my holidays were to be spent at Aunt Desirée's, and the impatience with which I looked forward to them may easily be understood. The two months at Rosevale seemed short, although Aunt Desirée's house was a solitude compared to the convent.

I had not even René's companionship. As he grew older he had become more and more wild and unsociable, and he persistently declined my aunt's invitations, some shame for a recent delinquency perhaps prompting him to adopt this line of conduct. For since the New Year began he had been sent to three different schools; in each case he had been sulky and silent, had always kept the lowest place in his class, and finally had run away and returned to Greenwood. His uncles had scolded him a little; but as their own early days had been marked by similar adventures they ended by forgiving him. It seemed likely that René would be always a dunce, his mental indolence was becoming incurable. I regretted his obstinacy for two reasons. In the

first place, I was still very fond of him; and secondly, I should rather have liked to present myself to him in my convent uniform.

I did not then know that this very uniform, together with my sedate appearance, had driven him away, but I afterwards learned that, after some hesitation, caused by the length of time which had elapsed since our last meeting, he had bent his steps to Rosevale the very morning after my arrival. I had put on my grand uniform in honour of Aunt Desirée, and just as he was going to take a short cut over a little wall, on whose top we had often run after one another like young kittens, he caught sight of me. At that very moment I was walking with all the grace I could command, to show off to my aunt the long dress, of which I was rather proud. The difference between the school-girl who now met his sight, and the rough-haired, romping, untidy child whom he had formerly known, was so great that he stood still in dumb amazement.

His dog Ralph, however, whose only feeling was that of pleasure in meeting a once-loved friend, darted towards me, irreverently rushed between Aunt Desirée's legs, and jumping on me, placed two damp and dirty paws on my bosom.

"Oh! the horrid dog!" I exclaimed, drawing back,—"Down, down!"

"It is Ralph," said Aunt Desirée, calmly.
"He is not so shy as his master, and keeps up the habit of coming sometimes to Rosevale."

It was Ralph, and at once I regretted my impatience, and turned to caress him, but he was off in the direction of the wall. René had whistled for him, and they both disappeared.

My holidays were by no means favourable to the improvement of my character, and I was anything but a model pupil. I was twelve years old when it was proposed that I should make my First Communion. I was sincerely desirous to accomplish this great act which ought, I was told, to be preceded by a complete reformation in my conduct.

Under the influence of this idea, and with the aid of Sara, who, in spite of the difference of our natures, continued to show much affection for me, I set seriously to work, and began to wage war with my faults.

It cost much to overcome my idleness, my impatience and my self-love; but at length the victory was gained, and the day which is called the best of one's life dawned for me. Such it was for me, and I shall never forget the time

when the door of heaven seemed to be opened, and the fresh childish heart was touched by a moment of perfect bliss. A great change took place in me, the dark shadows of my nature were softened, my heart was at peace, and the germs of hatred which, alas! had too soon found a place there, were stifled, while those principles which were afterwards to enable me to bear with resignation the most cruel trials, were established on the firm foundation of faith.



IX.

HE gentle readers who have, perhaps, found the history of my early childhood somewhat tedious, may now be glad to know that I left the convent of St. Mary on the morning of my eighteenth birthday.

Mr. and Mrs. Perceval, who had arrived at Prévalay on the previous day, sent for me, and I left that peaceful home for ever. Most of my early companions had already returned to their families: Sara had been in Paris with her mother for two years, and I had become the oldest pupil. I left the kindly shelter of my youth with sorrow, and shed many tears as I stepped into my father's carriage.

The servant told me thathe was ill, and that Mrs. Perceval was afraid to leave him, so my journey home was performed in solitude, and I could pursue my own reflections without any interruption. They were far from cheerful,

while they were confined to the realm of reality and possibility, but they brightened when I let them wander among visions which had sometimes made the peaceful, uneventful life at St. Mary's seem gloomy, and the refuge whose cool shadow had so long sufficed me appear too narrow. I must confess that my imagination had often flown beyond the convent-walls, and strayed wildly in that isle of pleasure which we call the world, or rather, in that world which we falsely deem an isle of pleasure.

But the bitterness of the draught is not tasted at the moment when we raise the cup to our lips, and in my ignorance I saw life spread out before me adorned with every attraction.

My heart beat quickly as I caught sight of the slender slated spire of Prévalay. Notwithstanding my father's apparent indifference, I had always cherished the deepest affection for him, and the idea of seeing him again brought the tears to my eyes.

But anguish filled my soul when I remembered that I should soon be again in Mrs. Perceval's power, and though I had long since forgiven her, I felt that respect and submission were all that I could offer her.

With eyes fixed on the copper cross which

surmounted the spire, and which shone like gold in the rays of the sun, I murmured a prayer that God would give me strength for the struggles which might be before me. Hope seemed to revive in my heart as I ascended the steps of my father's house.

So many years had elapsed since my separation from my stepmother, that her disposition might, perhaps, have changed; who could say whether the young girl might not even win the affection denied to the child?

The maid-servant led the way, and opening the door, announced, "Miss Perceval."

This seemed somewhat formal, but my stepmother was fond of ceremony, and was accustomed to it, and feeling somewhat hurt at being treated as a stranger, I entered the room.

My eyes were dazzled by the sunshine, and I could not distinctly see anything in the half-darkened drawing-room.

I went forward without seeing my way. I heard a gentle step, a hand clasped mine, a cold kiss touched my cheek, and a voice which I at once recognised, although the tone was softened, and although long years had passed since I last heard it, said: "How do you do, Gabrielle?"

"Draw up the blind, Augustine," added Mrs.

Perceval; "Miss Gabrielle has been dazzled by the sunshine."

The blind was raised, and a warm, bright ray fell on Mrs. Perceval, who was standing before me.

I could now see plainly. I looked timidly at her and thought her wonderfully beautiful. I thought that I should have found her aged, or at least changed, but years had only, so to speak, completed her beauty.

Mrs. Perceval was at this time almost thirtyfive, and she might have been taken for thirty. Although it was the morning, she was dressed with great elegance, and in perfect taste.

She looked at me very carefully: certainly she did not call me plain, as she had formerly done, but with a half smile, having studied my appearance from head to foot, she said: "My goodness, how tall you have grown, Gabrielle! Your height would have prevented my recognising you!"

This was as much as to say that my face had not changed. I felt the insinuation, but I did not wince under it. I tried to hope that the assurance of her advantage over me in looks might have made my stepmother more kindly disposed towards me; but, notwithstanding the friendly

manner of her greeting, I could not hide from myself that our position would be the same as before, only with less of inequality and more of diplomacy, for there was less distance between the girl and the woman than between the child and the young wife.

. I cannot explain the reason why there seemed to be an invincible natural antipathy between us; even when her beautiful black eyes were beaming on me with the semblance of tenderness, I felt their glance to be cold, and my gaze seemed, instead of resting on them, to be repulsed by them.

My first word was to ask for my father.

"He is very poorly," answered Mrs. Perceval.
"I had to keep him in bed, or he would have gone to meet you. Sit down;—I will send him word that you have come."

As she said this the door opened, and my father appeared. I ran to him; he held me for a moment in a close embrace; I thought I saw tears in his eyes, and they had a tender and pleading expression. Was he silently begging my pardon for having neglected me? I fancied it was so, and I answered by an affectionate kiss.

"How imprudent, Charles!" said Mrs. Per-

ceval,'in a tone which sounded rather imperious; "is it really right of a man who can hardly stand to leave his room without any reason?"

My father tottered: I moved an arm-chair forward; he sat down, and taking my hand in his, he spoke for a long time of the pleasure it gave him to see me at home, and of the many causes which had hindered him from visiting me at St. Mary's. The more I looked at him, the more was I struck with the great change in his appearance. I had left him in full vigour, and now he seemed almost an old man. He was very thin; his hair and his beard were nearly white, his colour was livid, his cheeks were hollow, and beneath his marked eyebrows his eyes sparkled with feverish brilliancy, and then became dull, like those of a dying man.

Mrs. Perceval, who listened to him carelessly, now interrupted him to remind him of the doctor's orders, and rose from her chair, asking him to accompany her. He obeyed her meekly, but before leaving the drawing-room, asked if my room had been pointed out to me.

"I will send Augustine to Gabrielle to show her her room," answered Mrs. Perceval, and they left me alone.

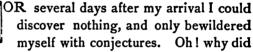
I then began to look more attentively at every-

thing around me. When she first came to live at Prévalay, Mrs. Perceval had bought a beautiful set of red velvet furniture; it was now replaced by one covered with yellow silk damask, the effect of which was strikingly good. Everything was in perfect harmony, and if I had not often heard Aunt Desirée lament over my father's ruinous extravagance, I should have supposed that he had come in for some great increase of fortune.

My reflections were interrupted by the entrance of Augustine, who led me to a charming room; my dressing-room was next to my father's room, and I felt grateful to Mrs. Perceval for this arrangement. I only saw him again for a moment in the evening, and he seemed to be low and sad.

My stepmother, however, said that his illness was not dangerous. What could, then, be the cause of his depression and his premature old age? As I lay down to rest I said to myself: "I shall soon find it out. Ah! Mrs. Perceval, I read in your eyes that you think me plain, but anyhow I won't be taken in by you."

X.



not my father confide in me?—his secret sufferings would have been mitigated, for I was persuaded that some mental distress was consuming him. His wife's power over him was absolute; his will always yielded to her iron one.

Mrs. Perceval saw a great deal of company; her drawing-room was always full in the afternoon, and I used to sit in a corner, with my work, listening to all that was said, and observing all that passed.

The majority of her visitors were gentlemen, and two or three, who were young and handsome, were particularly attentive to her. One, especially, came very often, and one day my father remarked this in a dry manner.

"Oh! what harm do you see in that, Charles?" she answered, in a tone which was half jocose and half bitter.

"A very great harm. You forget that our daughter is now living with us, and your door ought to be closed against these men of doubtful character, whom I have never really liked to see here."

"Come," said Mrs. Perceval, in a mocking voice, "no one will think of Gabrielle. I can assure you that not one of the gentlemen I receive has the least wish to become your son-in-law."

"And therefore I think it very unsuitable to admit them to our intimate acquaintance."

"Unsuitable!" repeated Mrs. Perceval, ironically;—"really, Charles, I do not understand you. To please you I must be shut up at Daniel Ville. You are simply a tyrant, and make me daily regret my weakness in consenting to leave Paris."

"We were only too long there," said my father, in a voice which betrayed much emotion.

"Enough!" answered Mrs. Perceval, harshly; "you know that I detest recriminations;—they are quite useless, and I think you are unreasonable in reproaching a woman of my age for tastes

which you were the first to gratify in our early married life."

I heard something like a suppressed murmur, and fearing to hear too much, I thought it more discreet to go to my own room.

My inexperience and my youth prevented my understanding this scene fully at the time; but soon the conversations which took place in the drawing-room enlightened me, and I knew one of the wounds which made my father's heart bleed. He was jealous.

This arose, in the first place, from the difference of age between him and his wife-a difference which became more marked as he passed from maturity to old age, and also from Mrs. Perceval's thoughtless conduct. Her heart was as cold as ice, but she craved for homage. I must observe that her coquetry was simply from vanity: no real accusation could be brought against her, though appearances were sometimes unfavourable. At any price she wanted a circle of admirers; the society of men pleased her, because in it her self-love was gratified. Such conduct might make her husband unhappy, or cover him with ridicule, it mattered not, and she felt no remorse in leaving the sad and gloomy invalid, who was mistaken enough, as she deemed

it, to prefer home quiet to the tumult of the world.

I thought it was in my power to do something to calm my father's irritation by being with my stepmother as much as possible, and always going into society with her.

The task was no easy one. In a large town the opportunities of appearing in public are many. Mrs. Perceval never missed one; nothing came amiss to her, whether it were worldly or religious; everywhere admiration attended her: men admired her beauty, and women her varied and elegant toilettes.

This woman, who at home was always stretched on her sofa, who lay in bed till ten o'clock on account of her delicate health, was absolutely intrepid in regard to the fatigue of a worldly entertainment. She would return home sulky, wearied, out of sorts, but health and strength returned, as by magic, with the next excitement.

She was in no wise ill-pleased to have me with her; her beauty eclipsed my youth, and she looked on me as a sort of patch, which produced a good effect.

Our home-life was full of uneasiness and strain. Mrs. Perceval's extravagance was excessive:

she indulged every caprice. There were scenes which furnished me with much matter for reflection, and I was fully alive to the artifices by which she obtained money from my father. But I could ask no questions: my father had the command of my mother's fortune, and I could not, without indiscretion, ascertain the real state of his affairs.

Fresh from the prudent lessons of the convent, I grieved over Mrs. Perceval's unbounded luxury, and the prospect of a life spent in such troubled surroundings appeared to me very discouraging.

Some elderly ladies, who had known my mother, spoke to me in reserved terms of my trying position, and expressed their wish to see me married young.

To be married!—that would give me a home, and I often thought about it. This was natural enough, and two things occurred to me: I was not pretty, and my mother's fortune, though very good, was not sufficient to ensure for me a brilliant match. I might, therefore, marry a poor young man, or a man of mature age who would prefer qualities of heart and mind to the charms of beauty.

Reason dictated this choice. I should not

have a very handsome or very clever husband: he would be a worthy man, and nothing more.

When my imagination came into play, everything wore a very different aspect. I became beautiful, and there crossed my path one of the rare beings created by the fancy of eighteen in its dreaming hours—an ideal husband, in fact. But the illusion soon vanished. I was very matter-of-fact, and, I am thankful to say, but little versed in romantic fictions. This was my single day-dream, and I only indulged in it when, wearied and disgusted with the reality of life, I felt the need of imagining a more congenial existence.

I kept up a brisk correspondence with Aunt Desirée; my letters were a delight to her and to Renotte; hers always began by many wise counsels, and amused me by their conclusions. I was informed of all that took place in Rosevale and the neighbourhood. I heard how many eggs the pigeons laid, and how many chickens were growing up under Renotte's maternal care. The good advice was lengthy, and my health was so precious to these two fond hearts that I did not venture to raise objections. Aunt Desirée's great anxiety was that I should wear flannel; every letter had dwelt on this topic,

until at last, to bring it to an end, I announced that I was going to put it on; they were completely satisfied. Aunt Desirée, from time to time, sent me pieces of superfine texture, which I immediately distributed to the Sisters of Charity for the benefit of poor women who really needed it. My constitution was healthy and vigorous, and I did not wish to lose the benefit of it by muffling myself up unnecessarily.

On Sunday afternoon I used to write my letters;—my stepmother then received visitors, but I took a holiday. The hours were devoted to the two who, after my father, had the largest share in my affection—Aunt Desirée and Mother Saint Louis. I had gradually established this as a custom, and on Sunday afternoon could shut myself up in my room, without fear of interruption.

I was, therefore, surprised when Augustine came one Sunday afternoon to tell me that some gentlemen who were in the drawing-room wished to see me.

I put away my writing with some regret, and went downstairs. A large circle was assembled, and I saw on Mrs. Perceval's lips a certain smile which I knew to my cost, and which showed me

that something had awakened the love of ridicule in her nature. Her neighbours were biting their lips, and I only heard the voice of my father, who was engaged in conversation with an elderly man, dressed in a very homely fashion.

When I came forward, the stranger rose and approached me, with an open and friendly smile on his countenance.

"Introduce me, Perceval," said he; "Gabrielle does not recognise me."

"Is it so, Gabrielle?" asked my father.

"I seem to know your face," I answered; "I have seen it when a child, but I can't remember where."

"What! have you really forgotten the old Greenwood uncles?"

If we had been alone I would have embraced him, so rejoiced was I to see the true, good friend who had received me so kindly when I fled from Daniel Ville.

"We have long been intending to come and renew our acquaintance with you, niece," said Mr. Du Bressy: "but country folk, you know, get like wolves, and it is hard to make them leave their dens. But yesterday we made up our minds seriously;—and so here I am, with

René, whom you don't know again, I suppose?"

His eyes turned to a tall young man, whom I had not before perceived. As he got up, blushing crimson, and bowed awkwardly, I saw why Mrs. Perceval and her friends had seemed to entertain themselves at his expense.

I took pity on the poor fellow's shyness, and merely bowed and smiled to him, so as to let him at once sit down again. He chanced to be just opposite to me, and I could not but see that the companion of my childhood looked very ridiculous.

Standing up, he struck me as very tall; but when he was seated, his back was round and he was bent double. His coat-sleeves were worn at the edges, and his wrists were brown and muscular. Between his short trousers and his clumsy shoes, his blue cotton socks were in wrinkles. His waistcoat was old-fashioned, and of a bad colour; his cravat ugly; and his high collar stuck out in two sharp starched corners. In fact, every detail of his attire was unfortunate.

Yet it was evident that he had taken much pains to make himself look well. His hair, which, judging from the thick and curly beard which covered the lower part of his face, must have been fair, was dark and shining from pomatum, and fell to one side like that of a sailor. With knitted brows and a gloomy expression, he sat motionless, and was a great contrast to the young men around him.

I never heard a word from him during that visit, and he went away without even looking at me.

The door was hardly closed on the uncle and nephew, when a smothered laugh broke forth; Mrs. Perceval then opened fire, with a volley of remarks, epigrams, and jokes against the absent men.

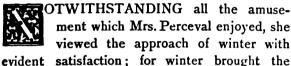
I was sorry not to be able to defend them, and rejoiced when my father suddenly cut the conversation short, in a decided manner, by saying that Mr. Du Bressy was a man in every way worthy of esteem and respect.

This visit seemed to be soon forgotten by all except myself, and I long remembered it. How could my early companion, whom I remembered as handsome, strong, and clever, have become the grotesque creature I had seen? And Aunt Desirée had said, in a recent letter, that René had grown a fine young man. Poor dear aunt!

she always saw those she loved through a medium of affection which made them beautiful and charming. Had not she told me that Renotte was, in her youth, a lovely brunette? This assertion had made it seem quite natural that I should be looked upon as a beauty.



XI.



evident satisfaction; for winter brought the season, and its pleasures were those dearest to her heart.

I, for my part, should have preferred a continuance of the social gatherings in which I had hitherto taken part. There were at Prévalay two or three very pleasant houses, where the neighbours met without ceremony or expensive dress, and these parties constituted our society. I had been kindly received in these circles, and whatever I possessed in the way of amiability, of grace, or intelligence, had made up for my plainness, which I have since heard was by no means repulsive. People said: "Miss Perceval is not pretty, but she is a very amiable girl." It would have been wiser for me to have been

content with these quiet and friendly entertainments, and to have turned a deaf ear to the suggestions of my stepmother, who did her best to make me share her unbridled love of gaiety.

One morning, when I entered her room, I was surprised by a most gracious reception; for generally my "good-morning" was met by a yawn or a bored and sulky expression of countenance.

"Here's a letter which concerns you as much as me, Gabrielle," said she, pointing to a sheet which lay open on the table.

I took it up, and read an invitation to the first ball of the season.

"Well," she said, looking fixedly at me, "what do you say? This is an opportunity for you to make your appearance in the world."

I looked at my father, who was writing.

"You mean to go, then, Ellen? I thought you said your last year's dresses were not fit to be seen?"

"Very true; but I had mistaken the date: it is the 19th, not the 9th, and that gives me time. Besides, you must introduce your daughter."

"I know it does you harm to be up late, father," said I, quickly; "and rather than hurt you, I would never go to a ball."

"But my presence is by no means necessary," said he; "and if you the least wish it, you must go, my child."

"But," I replied, "it will be a needless expense."

My stepmother frowned, and my father looked at her with a strange expression.

"If that is the only difficulty, I wish you to go," he said, in a tone which he seldom used to me, and never to his wife, and which was so determined that further argument was impossible. "You will take charge of her dress, Ellen," he added;—"I think I can trust you to have everything suitable?"

"Certainly," answered my stepmother, taking up a newspaper.

This was a sign that she did not wish to continue the conversation, and I went up to my room, full of the approaching event. For a young girl, there is magic in the word "ball." I did not, indeed, expect to produce a great effect; but I deemed myself at the time somewhat less plain than I really was, and I counted on my youth and on the novelty of the thing.

It was my first entrance into the world, and to take part in an entertainment of which my stepmother had often spoken with the greatest enthusiasm, seemed to me a most important matter.

After having dwelt for a time on the prospect, I began to think about my dress. I wanted to be simple, but in very good taste, and I spent some time in studying all the fashion-books within my reach.

I was not very frivolous, but I had a certain regard for appearance, and the most sensible girl of eighteen is not without some worldly tastes, which in my case had been much fostered by the atmosphere in which I lived.

After vainly endeavouring to make a selection amongst the various toilettes, I thought that Edith, one of my convent friends, would, from the experience which she had gained in the course of the preceding winter, be able to give me some valuable advice, and accordingly I wrote to her.

Her answer, which was impatiently looked for, reached me just as I was making up my mind to ask my stepmother to come with me and make the necessary purchases. Edith suggested a very simple and elegant dress, and particularly recommended me to wear nothing but white. I understood the reason of this advice: my complexion was much too florid, and bright colours were most unbecoming to me.

In accordance with Edith's advice, I made up my mind to have a white tulle dress, and to wear forget-me-nots and white lilac in my hair.

Having come to this decision, I put on mythings and went to Mrs. Perceval to ask her to take me out shopping. I confess that I was not without a secret hope that the time might not suit her, and that she might let me go without her; for I had a feeling that, if only from love of contradiction, she would change my plans: what she called advice amounted to a command.

I had made up my mind to have patience; and if sometimes I was inclined to resist her wishes, I controlled the inclination, fearing the effect which anything like a scene produced on my father. I found Mrs. Perceval in her room surrounded with materials; a shopman was displaying black lace over a magnificent yellow silk which lay on the bed.

She asked my opinion, and I gave it, expressing my admiration of the rich colour of the silk and the fine quality of the lace. Then I said that I had come to beg her to go out with me, but that since she was engaged, I would, with her permission, take Augustine, and go to make my purchases.

"Would the young lady like to see some other dresses?" asked the shopman.

"It is needless," replied Mrs. Perceval; "Miss Perceval's dress has been chosen already. I was preparing a surprise for you, Gabrielle. I wish to present you with your first ball-dress, and it was ordered ten days ago."

I stood in silent surprise. "Do you distrust my taste?" she asked, with a kind of smile.

I hastily answered in the negative, and thanked her with some constraint of manner.

"It is a trifle; but I have observed that you are slow in making up your mind when shopping, and I wanted to save you from the exercise of your economical habits, which are very good on common occasions, but would be quite out of place now when you are to make your appearance in the world. I wanted you to be perfectly well dressed, and so I have set my dressmaker, who has your measure, to work, and, with the help of her skill, I hope to have a very pretty dress ready for you."

"Won't she have to try it on?" I asked.

"No; it is nearly finished. Augustine gave her a good pattern, and I am sure it will suit you perfectly. You are very easy to fit."

It might be so, but the proceeding seemed to

me very summary. I knew my stepmother's taste, and I was sorry for the expense she had probably incurred without consulting me. Though she gave the present, I knew that my father would have to pay for it. However, I was obliged to accept the favour; so I tore up the paper on which my fruitless projects had been written, and waited, as best I could, for the arrival of my dress.

The dressmaker came several times, for Mrs. Perceval did not adopt for herself the system she had applied to my apparel.

It was the day but one before the ball, and I had heard nothing further, till at last Augustine came to call me. Mrs. Perceval was trying on a wreath, which suited her perfectly.

"My dear Gabrielle," said she, turning towards me with a movement which made the graceful spray fall on her neck, "let me offer you this simple ball-dress. I sincerely hope you will like it," and she raised a veil of gauze from the couch where lay a dress of surpassing beauty; but, alas! for the depth of feminine malice! it was rose-coloured—rose-coloured! Only fancy, my dear readers; and Edith had said: "White; nothing but white; no vivid colours!"

Mrs. Perceval smiled, and I now felt con-

vinced that the choice had been made with deliberate purpose.

"Let us see how you look," she said, and placing on my head a crown of roses which would have made another girl look beautiful.

"Very nice," said my father, with satisfac-

"Look at yourself, Gabrielle," said my stepmother, in an affectionate tone. I looked at the mirror before me, and for the moment the roses suited me, for I had turned pale with emotion.

"The dress is perfect," I said, as easily as I could;—"but what a pity it is not white!"

"Would you have liked white better?" asked Mrs. Perceval, with feigned surprise. "I am sorry I did not know it: young girls generally like rose-colour, it is so pretty and so becoming to brunettes. Do you remember a certain rose-coloured dress I had the year we were married, Charles?"

"Perfectly," said my father.

"I assure you, Gabrielle, you are quite mistaken in not liking rose-colour."

"But I do like it," I answered, somewhat hastily; "only for a ball-dress white seems to me the best for a young girl."

"Do you think so, my dear? It is quite a

mistake. All girls wear white, and your rose-colour will be out of the common."

"After all, it does not much signify;—the dress is beautiful," said I, not wishing to own that, as she already well knew, rose-colour with my complexion was against all laws of good taste.

I went to my room, accompanied by Augustine, who brought the dress and the wreath. All the next day I tried to reconcile myself to the idea of being clothed in rose-colour from head to foot: and as the dress was really beautiful, and most gracefully arranged, I gradually persuaded myself that I had exaggerated the effect of the rose-colour, and I awaited the eventful day with some impatience. I think, indeed that if the shade had been a little more subdued, I could have been quite satisfied, especially if by the mystery which Mrs, Perceval had made of the preparations, she had not given a thing in itself very simple the appearance of a plot.



XII.

OUNG girls who read this story, you will

easily understand the joy, the fear, and the hope, with which my heart was filled on the night of my first ball; I will not say that I was not rather feverish. The preliminaries were tiresome enough. My stepmother had appointed the time for the hair-dresser to come, and I was the first to be placed in his hands. She had also arranged the duties of the lady's maid, so that I was ready at seven o'clock, though we were not to start till nine. For two hours I sat on a sofa in the drawing-room, with my neck stiff lest I should displace my hair, and my figure upright lest I should crush my trim-If the world is bound to repay the trouble people take to please, I think something is still due to me.

There I was, then, dressed in rose-colour, with a weary body and an unsettled mind, waiting for the important moment. It came at last, and we got into the carriage, Mrs. Perceval taking a great deal of care of her dress and very little of mine—a proceeding quite of a piece with her usual conduct.

When we entered a large room, filled with brilliant light, my courage failed me, and with downcast eyes I followed Mrs. Perceval, who was a great centre of attraction. She passed on like a queen amid her subjects, and with a lofty grace returned the salutations addressed to her. Having paid our respects to the mistress of the house, we seated ourselves beside an old lady of our acquaintance, who, with two thin sallow daughters, was in the habit of going everywhere. Almost immediately, partners began to throng around Mrs. Perceval, and she took flight, regardless of the companion left behind her.

"That yellow dress is most becoming to Mrs. Perceval," said the old lady, in a sententious manner. "I think it is new."

"Certainly," answered the daughter, quickly.

"Ah! it costs something to be always elegant, and Mrs. Perceval is very well preserved! Eugenie, my dear, hold up your head."

Eugenie curved her straight form, and put on what she called a distinguished air.

"Your father is not very fond of society, I think," observed Madame Dauloir, in a tone which expressed at once asperity and politeness;
—"it is easy to see that he only goes out for his wife's sake."

Certainly this lady's remarks were not free from malice; yet my stepmother considered her a friend, and was trying to find a husband for the thin Eugenie.

"A man who marries a woman much younger than himself must expect these difficulties," she continued. "Indeed, he plainly told me the other day that he did not at all enjoy the thoughts of these continual evening parties. One can quite understand his feelings, but a young and pretty woman can hardly shut herself up to keep an old man company. By-and-by it will be different."

"They say that Mrs. Perceval is thirty-five," remarked Eugenie, giving utterance to her mother's thought.

"Yes, but who would think it? When you came in" (here Madame Dauloir turned towards me), "one would have taken you for two sisters about the same age."

"Very good," thought I;—"here is a hit at me. I look old."

And now the orchestra was silent, and I saw the throng make way for Mrs. Perceval. After so long and animated a dance one might have expected to observe some sign of fatigue; but nothing of the kind was to be seen. While others were actively wielding their fans to refresh their flushed faces by an artificial breeze, or applying their lace handkerchiefs to their dewy foreheads, Mrs. Perceval came forward, pale with that rich kind of pallor which by lamplight eclipses the brightest complexions.

She seated herself, and addressing me, said: "These ladies think your dress charming, Gabrielle. I have been much complimented about it. But, my goodness! what a colour you have! One would think you had been dancing."

My yellow neighbours exchanged a quiet smile. "As colours go," thought I, "red is better than yellow. My florid complexion is better than their parchment one."

Mrs. Perceval's remarks had provoked me even more than the false compliments which had been paid her, and I said to her: "No, I have not been dancing; but my dress heightens my colour, as, of course, it must."

"Rose-colour really only suits pale people," said the wan Eugenie, "and I was surprised at your wearing it, Gabrielle. You always said that nothing on earth would make you wear it at a ball."

"But this dress is my mother's choice," I rejoined, with feigned sweetness, so as to be heard by Mrs. Perceval;—"she was so kind as to present me with it."

This little stroke of malice concluded the conversation. My stepmother and the young ladies went to dance. Madame Dauloir stopped a passing tray of refreshment, and was soon occupied with a vanilla ice.

I should have liked to dance this quadrille, and I grew uneasy. I put on an indifferent air; I examined the flowers in my bouquet and the seams of my gloves, and I came to the conclusion that it is not pleasant to begin to be a wall-flower when one is eighteen.

At last, to my great delight, a tall young man, with a beardless chin and an awkward figure, came, I have no doubt, at the suggestion of the lady of the house, and languidly asked for the honour of the next dance.

It could not be refused. We wandered about the ball-room, like two scared birds, in search of a vis-à-vis, and finally took our places for the

country-dance. My partner was timid, and said not a word: it mattered not, I danced for dancing's sake. The air was stifling; I fanned myself desperately;—but the temporary alleviation given by fanning is often followed by a sense of aggravated oppression.

I thought that people were looking much at us. I understood the glances of the young girls and the smiles and whispers of some young men, and an indefinite feeling of uneasiness crept over me. I hung down my head in confusion, and I only longed to hide from all these indifferent or critical eyes the crimson shining face reflected by all the mirrors around me.

At last the country-dance was over, and I returned to my stepmother's side.

"Surely you feel ill, Gabrielle," said she. "I don't know if it is still the effect of your dress, but you look as if you were going to have a fit."

I let her enjoy her triumph; anything I could then have said would have seemed like spite. I hid myself behind my fan, my eyes and my cheeks were burning. Soon the Misses Dauloir came back, and each in succession remarked, "My goodness! how red you are!" Their mother kindly proposed to leave the room with me, but I had taken root, and even to save

myself from a stroke of apoplexy it would have been impossible to pass through the ball-room.

I danced but little more, and the night seemed mortally long. I might as well have been alone in my corner.

Mrs. Perceval only appeared for a moment occasionally. Madame Dauloir, who had made a very good supper, remained perfectly quiet, and gradually got very sleepy. Her daughters were furious at not dancing every dance, and when sitting down preserved a sulky silence.

Mrs. Perceval had a marvellous success; her beauty, although it was on the wane, surpassed that of the other women present. The splendour of that setting sun was unequalled, and was only impaired by the fear of being replaced by some new luminary.

But I thought little of rising or setting suns, and only longed for the ball to come to an end. My illusions had been dispelled, and I saw that a plain woman cannot hope to enjoy the world unless she is too proud to admit her want of success, or too modest to be grieved by it.

I left the brilliant ball-room more eagerly than I had entered it, and when I reached my room I gladly threw aside the beautiful dress, which I had foolishly hoped might have the power of making me look well.

Mrs. Perceval was in no such hurry. Some time after I was in bed, I heard her open her dressing-room door, and ask my father why he was still up.

"I went to bed and got up again," he said;—
"I have a violent headache, and I could not sleep,"

"Then you might as well have come with us," she answered from her room;—"to be awake here or awake there would have been all the same."

"I had rather suffer at home than in the house of other people, Ellen."

"Who knows but that the amusement might have done you good? It was a delightful ball."

"And Gabrielle," asked my father;—"did she dance, and did she enjoy herself?"

A suppressed laugh was the only answer to this question, and I grew red with vexation.

"What do you mean, Ellen?" inquired my father, in a grave tone. "Do you intend me to understand that my daughter was thought ridiculous?"

Oh, how I felt I loved him as he spoke! It did me good to hear the tone in which he said "my daughter."

"No; not ridiculous," replied Mrs. Perceval, "but very plain."

"Plain, plain!" repeated my father, as if aggrieved.

"My goodness, yes! Gabrielle is not pretty; still she is tall, and well-made, and ladylike. But at the ball her face counteracted everything, and the remarks I heard about the poor child were by no means flattering."

Here was wound after wound for my selflove, and, worst of all, was my stepmother's contemptuous pity.

"Well," said my father, "if this is the case, Gabrielle will not be very fond of the world, and she will be none the worse for that."

"How do you know that? Hitherto she has not shown any great horror of it."

"She is young; but she has quite sense enough to listen to the voice of reason, and she will be all the happier at home."

"Do you think so? Spite never yet brought anyone to virtue."

"I spoke of reason, not of spite. Gabrielle has many valuable qualities and an excellent heart;—and it is well for us, Ellen, for she has much to forgive us."

The only answer to this strange remark was a yawn, and silence then reigned in both the rooms.

When I awoke in the morning I recalled the impression made on my mind by the evening's event, and I resolved not to go into society any more unless in case of necessity. But a difficulty arose. How could I escape the invitations which would no doubt follow my appearance at the ball? How could I draw back from the pleasures which I had decided to taste without appearing to be acting from wounded vanity? At this moment I was influenced by many little weaknesses for which, two years later, I should have blushed.

With these perplexities on my mind I went to bid my father good-morning. His manner was unusually affectionate, and this gave me patience to bear the half-concealed mockery of his wife. I bore her remarks bravely, but I was much irritated, and my resolution to give up the world gained strength. I only wanted an ostensible reason, and while I was racking my brain to find one I received a letter from Aunt Desirée. Gout had again attacked her, she was worse, and she begged me to go and spend some days with her. I lost no time in asking my father's

permission, which he somewhat regretfully granted, and I went to Rosevale, happy to escape from this anxious, restless life, which endangered my good resolutions and awakened feelings which I had thought to be completely dead.



XIII.

HE first few days I spent at Rosevale refreshed me, perhaps because my vexation had run its course, or per-

haps because of the joy which my return awakened. I cannot say, but certainly Aunt Desirée recovered as if by magic. She could not move from her arm-chair; but as soon as she was free from pain, her gaiety and goodhumour returned. She seemed to have grown stouter, and as she was obliged to keep her poor legs in a horizontal position, I could observe their great size. This made me think of the garter, my first piece of work, which had been interrupted by my father's letter recalling me, and I spoke to her of it. Not only did she perfectly remember all about it, but, at a sign from her, Renotte drew to her side a little old-fashioned cabinet, surmounted by a gnarled and dusty tree, on which were perched two or three ill-stuffed

birds, and from a locked drawer she drew forth a long and twisted strip of white woollen knitting. This was the famous garter, and it was not the only treasure laid up in that deep drawer. I found a carriage made of rushes, the handiwork of René, who had built it for Azor. It was yellow, crushed, and misshapen; but it was a relic from old times, and naturally led me to speak of my former companion. Aunt Desirée's answers were laconic, and mingled with buts and ifs, which were not usual with her. She did not say anything against him, but I gathered that she was not altogether satisfied with him.

These first quiet days passed quickly by, but monotony and I had become unfamiliar companions, and before a fortnight had passed I felt a weariness whose cause I could not mistake. I had become accustomed to live in the midst of movement and excitement, and solitude increased the void of which I was sensible. That which had sufficed for the child and for the school-girl was not enough for the young woman who had seen something of the world. My affection for my aunt and for Renotte was, indeed, unchanged, but the things which had of old been most deeply interesting had now lost much of their charm. The old gray cat lost half her tail in a

rash expedition to the barn, where a trap had been set, and I was insensible as a stone to her pitiful complaints and the sorrow of her mistress.

When a conversation began, I at first took an active part, and then, spite of myself, my thoughts wandered elsewhere. Aunt Desirée would calmly proceed at once with her knitting and her discourse, and only find out my inattention when I made some very inappropriate reply to some remark. Then she would toss her head with a smile, would move her legs and adjust her spectacles, saying, with a pinch of snuff between her finger and thumb: "Just like young girls!—their wits are always woolgathering!"

At last fine weather, which I had ardently desired, came. Frost took the place of rain, and I lost no time in availing myself of a permission to go out walking. The cold was sharp. I went down to the river, intending to return to Rosevale by another way. I had to cross a little narrow bridge without any rail, and it looked very slippery. I did not notice this in time, and soon perceived that a false step might easily be taken, and that I was in danger of a cold bath. I stood still, considering whether I

could prudently retrace my steps, when the barking of a dog made me look up, and I saw, coming down the path opposite to me, a tall young man in shooting dress, carrying a gun. This meeting, in the position in which I was placed, was most unpleasant. I did not venture to take a step in any direction, and I watched the stranger's movements. Instead of turning to the right, as I had hoped he would do, he came straight to the bridge. On seeing me, he stopped and whistled to his dogs, which were rushing forward and would certainly have thrown me down. I made up my mind to turn back and leave the bridge clear, but my foot slipped, and I fell. Instantly, almost before I had touched the planks, a strong hand seized me, and I found myself standing face to face with the stranger, who had come just in time to save me from a plunge in the river.

I thanked him as best I could, and he remarked that it was difficult to cross the bridge that morning. I thought the voice was not altogether unfamiliar to me; but, unable to recognise the speaker, I bowed, and was turning away, fearful of another stumble, when, unceremoniously taking hold of my shawl to stop me, he said: "Surely, Gabrielle, you know who I am?"

"No," said I, much amazed, and looking in his face.

He smiled.

"What!" I exclaimed; —"is it you, René?"

"Yes, indeed, Gabrielle. Must I put on a black coat to be recognised?"

I was amused at this adventure, and looked at René with some surprise. He did not seem like the same youth who had called at Daniel Ville with his uncle. In the shooting-jacket, which showed his tall, straight figure to advantage, he appeared at his ease, and was almost graceful. His chestnut hair, now free from pomatum, was short and curling, a thick beard of a lighter colour covered the lower part of his face, and his frank, open, and gay expression of countenance was as different as possible from the aspect under which he had last appeared.

"I can come back by Rosevale," he said. "I have no luck with the wild ducks to-day. Let me walk with you."

He offered me his arm in the most friendly manner. I took it to cross the bridge, and we returned slowly, chatting of our childhood and of many pleasant old memories. After some hesitation, René made up his mind to come in and pay my aunt a visit.

"I think he is as good-natured and simplehearted as ever," said I, when he was gone.

"Yes, indeed; but—but he has been badly brought up."

I often now met René in my walks. With me his shyness and unsociability were at an end. He used to stop and talk, and often accompanied me back to the house. As we were cousins, and as young people are allowed to enjoy a certain amount of freedom in the country, this was all quite natural and suitable. Uncle Felix also came to see us; but his brother, I knew not why, notwithstanding his desire to see more of me, never appeared at Rosevale.

The winter promised to be a severe one: frost and snow continued, and wild animals forsook the woods. I heard from René that a wolf had been seen in the neighbourhood. A hunting party was arranged, and the day it took place I established myself in an old wing of the house, whose upper windows commanded an extensive view over the coppice. With the aid of a glass, I was able to follow the movements of the hunters, who had chosen René as the head of their party. He was the hero of the day; and the wolf, killed by him, was brought in solemn procession into the village, amidst the acclama-

tions of all the boys. The hunters met in a little lonely house, to dine together and celebrate the triumph.

René had promised that he would come and give me a full account of the events of the day. After waiting a long time for him, I began to think that he had forgotten me, when he appeared in the yard. His step was quick, and he seemed very gay and animated. He came boisterously into the drawing-room, went up straight to Aunt Desirée, and without apparently perceiving that I was there, began to talk of the hunt with excitement such as I had never before seen him manifest. From time to time he burst into a laugh, and, I must confess, his merriment did not strike me as at all witty, and I thought that reserve suited him better.

"You seem very hot, my poor boy," said Aunt Desirée, suddenly;—she was listening with much attention to his confused narration, and observed that he constantly wiped his face with his hand-kerchief.

"Yes, aunt, and I am thirsty, too;—but I wanted to see you. Long ago I liked Rosevale, and you used to receive me here so kindly. Would you let me have a glass of wine?"

"Certainly;—Renotte, bring a bottle of wine and a glass for Mr. René."

Renotte brought the wine, and after he had taken a large glass he went on to say: "How kind you are, aunt!—but, indeed, you were always good to me;—my uncles said so oft—oft—often." And the sound of a kiss was heard, for René had risen from his seat and clasped Aunt Desirée tenderly to his heart.

I smothered my laughter in my handkerchief. "What could I have been thinking of?" said I to myself, observing his watery eyes, his parched lips, and inane smile. "Rene is half drunk."

"I have always had compassion for motherless children," said Aunt Desirée, with feeling, as she adjusted her front and her cap, which had been disarranged by his embrace. "It is so sad! Give me my snuff-box."

René held out his glass.

"I asked for my snuff-box," said my aunt;—
"is it not on the table?"

René felt about for it, took it, and opening it, plunged his fingers into it, and then presented it to Aunt Desirée in so awkward a manner that a great deal of the snuff fell on the floor.

"What was I saying?" continued the good old lady, without any appearance of annoyance,

while she shook the snuff out of the folds of her dress into the gold box. "Oh, how sad it is to see the mother of a family taken away!"

"Sad!" repeated René, pouring out, with unsteady hand, another glass of wine, which he swallowed immediately.

"Indeed, I often said to myself, 'the Du Bressys are good and kind, but how will they bring up the poor child?' Don't you remember, Renotte, how anxious I used to be?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Renotte, coming forward to give her testimony.

"And Renotte," stammered out the poor youth, warmed by the wine—" Renotte was very good to the orphan." And he approached her with outstretched arms;—but Renotte had very strict ideas of propriety, and she drew back, saying:

"Stop, Mr. René! I don't like that kind of thing."

Aunt Desirée looked on in bewilderment, and then, recollecting my presence, glanced at me under her spectacles, as if to say, "What can it all mean?"

I could not stop laughing, so ridiculous did the whole thing appear.

"But where is Gabrielle?" asked René, turning to my aunt;—"I want to see her.

Aunt Desirée, dear little aunty, pray do tell me." And he took her gouty hands in his, and pressed them, saying, "Where is she, aunt?"

I thought of making my escape, being uncertain where the demonstrations of tenderness would end. But Aunt Desirée took care not to betray me, and pushing him back rather hastily, she took off her spectacles, looked steadily at him, and said: "René, you are tipsy."

"No, no, aunt;—but it was I that killed the wolf."

"Are you not ashamed to come into my presence in such a state?" she continued, indignantly. "Leave the room, sir, and go back to your comrades."

René, with a fawning air, again stretched out his hand for the bottle.

"Take that away, Renotte," said my aunt;—and Renotte, seizing the neck of the bottle in her crooked fingers, took it from him without difficulty.

"Go away;—will you go?" repeated Aunt Desirée, who was now fairly exasperated;— "must I have you turned out, you ill-mannered youth?"

The harsh tone, to which he was quite unaccustomed, made an impression on René. He got up, tottered for a moment on his long legs, and then went out. When he got into the yard he began to sing.

Aunt Desirée, with folded hands and an expression of consternation, looked at me.

"So this is what you shrank from telling me," said I, seating myself beside her.

"My goodness! the poor fellow is ruining himself!"

"I don't know why you are so surprised, aunt," I remarked, speaking hastily, though I could hardly have explained my irritation; "one would fancy that his bad habits were something new to you."

"My dear child, I wished to deceive myself about him; and even now, when I think of the circumstances, I don't know if one ought to condemn him too easily. Each time that such a misfortune has happened, it has not really been so much his own fault as that of his friends, who have induced him to take too much. He cannot bear stimulants: a thimbleful of brandy makes him tipsy."

"Horrid creature!" I exclaimed, in disgust.
"A drunkard! Oh!"

"Without being a drunkard, a young man may sometimes transgress," said my aunt,

becoming calmer as my horror increased. "After a fatiguing day, René was with a party of men who certainly are not members of the temperance society. He was led astray, forgetting his own weakness. Unfortunately, his uncle Francis had the same habit, and the least imprudence of René's will be considered in the light of a family failing. I know, better than anyone, what it was that drove poor Francis to drink: it was simply unrequited love."

"For whom?" I asked, with some curiosity.

"For your mother—for my poor dear Gabrielle."

These words came upon me as a new revelation. I had never before been able to understand why the sight of me had made so strange an impression on Mr. Francis, or why he took such an interest in me.

"Tell me about those old times," I begged: "they would be so interesting to me." I took my work, ready to listen.

"Willingly, I will tell you, dear child, and I trust you will profit by the story if ever you are in similar circumstances. Your mother, when a young girl, came to spend some time with me. She was very pretty and very merry, as people are when they are young, and when life is sweet.

I can see her now, sitting at her work, just as you are doing this moment. Sometimes the illusion is complete; for, especially at a little distance, you are wonderfully like her."

At this point I raised my eyes to a mirror which hung opposite me, and I shook my head, for the image which it presented to my view convinced me that the resemblance had no existence save in the heart and mind of my aged aunt.

"The Du Bressys were then fine young men," continued my aunt; "rather shy and countrified certainly, but agreeable when they chose. All three fell in love with their pretty cousin; but in the case of Ludovic and Felix it soon passed away. Ludovic married, and Felix, who was younger than Gabrielle, soon contented himself with cousinly affection; but poor Francis was hopelessly smitten. Gabrielle laughed and made merry with her cousins, and having found out poor Francis' secret, tormented him by her indifference. He opened his heart to me, and I promised to speak to Gabrielle in his favour. She laughed a great deal, but at length confessed that she was touched by her cousin's affection, and that she had no objection to him. Francis, as happy as man could be, went to speak to his

parents; a formal proposal was made, and he hopefully awaited the answer. It came, and it was a refusal. Gabrielle had met Mr. Perceval in society, and had, with inexcusable fickleness, forgotten all the encouragement given to her cousin, and the half-promises made by her and by her family. Francis went away, almost wild with despair, and vainly struggling against a decision which blighted his future. He did not return till after Gabrielle's marriage, and he then adopted his present mode of life. It was said that he took to drink to drown his sorrow, and this was too true. Later on, good principles triumphed, and saved him from destruction. But he has always been very peculiar, and very unsociable, and since my niece's wedding-day he has never visited Rosevale. I can enter into his feelings, for here he had known Gabrielle. My goodness! how he loved her. He would never have married again!"

This last exclamation was no sooner uttered than repented of, and to save Aunt Desirée from the pangs of remorse, and above all, from the need of justification, I pretended not to have heard it, and the conversation was changed.

XIV.

IGHT days went by, and I heard no more of René; but on the ninth as I was returning from a visit to a poor

woman in our neighbourhood, I saw him at the other end of a path which I had taken as a short Many malicious suggestions of retribution occurred to my mind, and I began seriously to consider whether I had better adopt a dignified or a sarcastic tone; then I said to myself, "surely I am very foolish and very unkind this morning. For a momentary forgetfulness, a passing fault, am I going to overwhelm the poor fellow with contempt, when, no doubt, he is already dreadfully ashamed of himself? And even if it is worse than this, what right have I to censure his conduct? I will, if necessary, keep him rather at a distance, and that will be enough." So I met René as if nothing had happened, and without seeming to observe his confusion I asked

him where he was going. This simple question increased his embarrassment.

"I am just strolling about," he said:—" and if I had not met you, I should have gone on to Crook's wood. The charcoal-burners are poaching there, and it is very hard for a sportsman to see all the game destroyed on his ground."

"Yes, indeed, and I heartily wish you may meet the offenders. Good-bye, René." I nodded my head in a friendly manner as I spoke, and then went on. At the end of the field there was a fence, and I was obliged to turn aside. René was standing on the spot where we had parted, and was watching me; our eyes met, and in a moment he joined me.

"You are angry, Gabrielle," he said in a voice which betrayed emotion. "You have been generous enough not to reproach me as I deserve, but I see that you are not the same to me, and that you despise me."

I was silent.

"You do not answer," said he;—"have I fallen so low in your esteem that you will not condescend to listen to my excuses? I swear to you, Gabrielle, that I am not a drunkard; sometimes I am led away, and sometimes companions have been mischievous enough to

take advantage of my weak head, but that is all."

- "I believe you, René," said I, touched by this frank confession. "I was grieved to think that you, my early companion, could have fallen into such a degrading vice."
- "Upon my honour, Gabrielle, it is not so; and I have quite made up my mind not even to touch those intoxicating drinks which so soon affect me."
 - "That is a wise resolution."
- "Yes, but rather difficult to carry out. Do you know I am in the midst of men who drink? We drink whenever we meet, and yet we ought to profit by the experience of others. But the lesson I have brought upon myself will be of use, and I will put an end to the reputation which people were beginning to give me."
- "Very good; I will remember your promises, and will make your apologies to Aunt Desirée."
- "How would it be if I went myself to tell her how sorry I am?"
 - "But your poachers?"

He smiled, and said: "Those poachers came very conveniently to take me out of a difficulty. I was afraid that, after my ridiculous behaviour, you would reproach me or laugh at me. I did

not dare to tell you that I was looking for you, though really for some days I have been watching all your movements. My pride was terribly wounded, and if you had made fun of me even in the most indirect manner, or had cast on me one of those hard looks which say even more than words, I should have been obstinate and hardened, and you would have seen no more of me. You have been kind and forgiving, I thank you for it."

How I now rejoiced that I had practised that charming virtue of kindness which proceeds from charity, and gives such sweetness and such stability to human affections and to our intercourse with one another! What good would it have done me to alienate one whose heart was so true, and whose words were so sincere, and who gave me his confidence and friendship so simply?

I brought him to Rosevale. Aunt Desirée, after giving him a short sermon on temperance, granted him a full and free pardon; and Renotte, who was very fond of him, would willingly have begged his forgiveness for the roughness and incivility of her bearing.

XV.

EARINESS had taken flight, and the winter passed cheerfully. In the beginning of March Aunt Desirée gave

me, what I had longed wished to possess, a little Breton horse. I called him Fergus, and as I had been accustoned to ride quiet Cocotte, I mounted Fergus, who, however, was rather wild. René, who was a capital horseman, and very fond of horses, considered it prudent to accompany me on Miss Flora, his beautiful, impetuous Arab mare; and in order that we might prolong our rides according to my inclinations, Uncle Felix was kind enough to be of the party. There was no need for me to send for the gentlemen, for when the sky was bright and the afternoon promised well, they were sure to appear.

I wrote every week to my father, who answered my letters now and then; when he wrote he always complained with some bitterness of my voluntary absence from home. Nothing was ever said by him or by me about Mrs. Perceval.

"How old are you, Gabrielle?" asked Aunt Desirée, one day, with an abstracted air.

"Past eighteen, aunt."

"Already; are you quite sure?"

(One of my aunt's little weaknesses was a belief that no one near her ever grew old.)

"Perfectly certain."

"Then you will soon be of age; and, anyhow you are fit to be your own mistress. Has your father ever spoken to you about your affairs?"

"Never, aunt. But why should he?—he provides amply for all my needs."

"It is all very well to be unselfish, but if you were to marry, this indifference could not be permitted to continue. I have a conviction that he has not always been very prudent, and I would not answer for the state of his fortune. I mean, of course, his own private fortune; for he was in honour bound not to touch yours, which, besides, is protected by the family council and by the law. But, to tell the truth, I am surprised at the style in which he has been living, especially considering that his second wife had nothing. However, I hope he has means that

we don't know of, or else he would be totally ruined."

"He may have made a good deal of money in the business on account of which he went to live in Paris, aunt."

"He would not make a mystery of that, my dear."

"You know my father is very reserved; he never speaks of his private concerns."

"So much the worse; but after all, that is his own affair, and thank God, if he does make ducks and drakes of his money, you can do without it, as your mother's fortune will be a nice provision for you."

Nothing more was said on this delicate subject, and the very day of the conversation in question I received a letter from my father, in which he said plainly that he could not bear my being in any house but his own, that he was about to go to Daniel Ville for the summer, and that I must join him and Mrs. Perceval there as soon as possible.

Though I was very happy at Rosevale, I should have returned home with pleasure, but that the thought of being again subject to Mrs. Perceval's yoke was hateful to me. Duty however, lay clearly before me, and with some re-

luctance I began my preparations for the journey which was to take place on the following day. I had nearly completed them, when René arrived at full speed; he soon saw me, and greeting me, said: "Don't you want to ride Fergus to-day, Gabrielle? The weather is lovely, and my uncle, who had to go to his farm at Whitebridge, will very soon be here."

"Really René, I am not in spirits for a ride to-day," I answered sadly.

"Why not, my dear child?" asked Aunt Desirée, who had heard our words at her open window;—"the air will do you good, and Renotte will soon finish that dreadful packing."

"What do you say about packing, aunt?" asked René.

"Gabrielle will tell you."

After all, thought I, a last ride on my little horse will do me good; and I leant out of the window to tell René I would go; then hastily put on my habit and went down stairs. I found Uncle Felix talking to my aunt.

René had tied Miss Flora to the paling, and gone to the stable, whence he soon returned, leading Fergus saddled and bridled. We bade good-bye to Aunt Desirée, who had got her armchair placed near the window, and we set off.

Almost as soon as we had left the yard, René asked me to tell him what Aunt Desirée had meant.

I told him of my approaching departure, which distressed him greatly. For some time we trotted on side-by-side, neither of us breaking silence. We came to a ford, which we used often to cross, and here René pulled up his horse, and turning to me, said: "Does this spot bring anything back to your mind, Gabrielle?"

I looked round. At our right, on its single massive buttress, rose the stone bridge by which the town was gained. The river here was fringed with alders, whose round heads were mirrored in the water.

"I can never forget it," I answered. "There," and I pointed with my riding whip to the very place,—"there I saw my father for the first time."

"Yes; and we both hid ourselves behind the trunk of that old alder-tree."

"Oh, yes! how well I remember it!"

"And do you remember what happened before we came here? How you would have the little fish brought back from the pond that had been prepared for it, and how I got my face and hands all covered with mud?"

I never knew till then how good was René's memory.

"But that did not hinder you from kissing me," he continued;—"and you said,—perhaps you know what you said as well as I do?"

"Indeed, I do not, René."

"Well, you said, 'I will ask Aunt Desirée to make us some chocolate cream' (I was very fond of it), 'and when I am big I will be your wife.'"

René spoke with an affectionate gravity which was hardly in keeping with the childish reminiscence, and which caused me no little embarrassment.

"That is what you promised," he said, holding in Miss Flora, who had become impatient of our delay.

"Certainly, René; and now I remember your proud reply, 'I don't care about that.'"

"It is true, I did say it; but now, Gabrielle, what would you answer if I, as a man, asked you to do what you promised as a child? Perhaps you will now reply, 'I don't care about that?"

Fergus started at this moment, and so my answer to this very plain question was conveniently delayed. Some moments passed before I could manage to control my horse or my feelings Uncle Felix pretended not to hear anything, but I saw a smile beneath his moustache. We trotted on in silence for a while, and René spoke to me but once more during that ride. The road we took was bordered by marshy meadows, starred with forget-me-nots. He stooped down at the risk of losing his balance, and gathering a bunch of the flowers from the bank presented them to me, saying: "When you are at Daniel Ville do not forget me."

I took the sweet blue flowers, and fastened them in my girdle.

"Well answered," said Uncle Felix, laughing. René left us, a little before the gate of Rosevale was reached.

"Poor fellow, he is very anxious," said Uncle Felix;—"he fears that you may not give a favourable answer to the proposal which we intend to make. To meet with a refusal from your father would wound us deeply, and therefore, before anything is said to him, we want to know the state of your feelings for our nephew."

We arrived at Rosevale as he spoke, and immediately he went to Aunt Desirée; afterwards I was summoned, and they begged me to say candidly how I would answer the important question. For two hours I had been seriously

considering it, and I confess I saw no single objection in the way of my consent.

I therefore gave a simple and decided answer, but with the clear understanding that my engagement was completely subject to my father's approval.

René came to spend the evening. Happiness made him gay and communicative, and our projects and visions of the future were bright and beautiful.



XVI.

HE next day I left Rosevale. My joy
was clouded when I reached home, for
I found my father dreadfully altered

both in body and mind. His spirits were very bad, and his temper had become strange and uncertain. He and his wife did not get on well together, and I was distressed by the coldness of his manner to me. Between my silent, discontented, morose father, and my stepmother, who was more satirical, more ill-humoured, and more bored than ever, my position would have been almost insupportable, but for the affection which dwelt in my heart and sweetened all my trials. The more I looked forward to my future, the more did my soul rejoice in the deliverance from all the cares and anxieties of my present life. I imagined how it would be when I was René's wife. All the little weaknesses of his character would have vanished; I should be the

beloved of that true-hearted man, free in my dependence on him; and I rejoiced in the hope that my father might find in the society of his children some distraction from his domestic cares and secret sorrows.

A few days after our arrival at Daniel Ville I was at work in the drawing-room, my father was slumbering in his arm-chair, and my stepmother reading, when Mr. du Bressy was announced. René came forward with an ease of manner which he had acquired in our intercourse at Rosevale. He apologised for appearing in his shooting dress, but he had been led on as far as Daniel Ville, and he did not like to miss the opportunity of visiting its inhabitants.

His visit was a short one. Mrs. Perceval made herself agreeable, and asked him to come again.

"I seem to know that young man's face," she said, when the door had closed behind him. "Where can I have seen Mr. du Bressy? Is he not a relation of yours, Charles?"

My father, who never cared for conversation, made no reply. Mrs. Perceval shrugged her shoulders and looked at me, as if expecting an answer to her question.

"Yes," said I; "my mother was first cousin

to René's father. You saw him here in the end of last summer: one of his uncles was with him."

"What! can he be the queer creature at whom I laughed so much? Impossible!"

"The very same. He was very badly dressed that time, and as shy as could be. Now, though he has not a great deal of self-possession, he has got over some of his timidity; my aunt herself remarked a great change in him."

Mrs. Perceval looked hard at me, and I coloured to the very roots of my hair. "Oh, then, you saw him at Rosevale?" she exclaimed, "Was he often there?"

"Nearly every day," I answered, bravely, but without venturing to raise my eyes.

"I begin to understand why you did not find the time hang heavy, my love. This young man is a charming companion, and his visits must have enlivened the solitude which you described as so profound. Can he by any chance be the gallant squire who taught you to ride?"

"Yes."

"And why did you conceal his name?"

"I told my father of my cousin's kind attentions," said I, shocked by the strange question.

A malicious smile passed over Mrs. Perceval's face. "It is true," she remarked, "that Mr.

Perceval seemed to speak to me with reluctance of your taste for riding. He has so often reproached me for my rides in the Bois de Boulogne, that he could not well have said much about your excursions."

"I beg your pardon," said I, firmly, "but really I can see no likeness between the two. To go to the Bois de Boulogne, conforming in every way with the laws of Parisian fashion, is a very different thing from taking a quiet country ride with one's near relations."

"I do not know that you have the right to criticise my conduct," said Mrs. Perceval, haughtily.

"No, and I should not think of doing so, but you made a comparison which I think scarcely fair. From yourself I learned the reasons which led my father to object to your amusements in Paris."

"That may be; but such reasons do not exist here. I can enjoy a ride without the expense which led to such outcry. I have got my habit, and I will get one made for my sister, whom I expect here;—it will be a pleasant way of passing the time."

"Certainly, nothing can be more enjoyable than a ride in fine weather."

- "The horse that was brought from Rosevale belongs to you, I think?"
 - "Yes; let me beg you to make use of it."
- "Thanks; I shall be glad to do so, for Sting is skittish, and it would be well to begin with a quieter horse. Is yours tractable?"
- "Yes; thanks to my cousin, who trained it perfectly."
 - "You mean Mr. Du Bressy?"
 - "Yes."
- "Do you think he would kindly come with me the first few days? I cannot look for such a service from Mr. Perceval."
 - "I am sure René will gladly accompany you."
- "So much the better. How wonderfully that young man has improved! Is he rich?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Perceval leant back indolently on the sofa, and closed her eyes; then, after a long yawn, reopened them, saying: "Oh, how dull and dreary the country is! If I can't persuade Sara to come here for the summer months, I shall die of it. I must write to her again. You know Sara, Gabrielle?"

"Were not we brought up together? I have a most pleasant recollection of her."

"Then you will be glad to see her again?"

"Indeed, I shall."

"Well, you will soon have that pleasure. I will not be put off with her promises any longer; and if she does not make up her mind, I will go and fetch her, whether Charles likes it or not."

All this conversation was carried on in my father's presence, but he seemed to take no heed of it. He was in a sort of apathy—a body, as it were, without a soul. I began to feel seriously uneasy about the strange state in which he had been ever since my return from Rosevale. It was not natural that in a moment, without any apparent cause, he should pass from feverish irritation to the deepest depression; and I could not at all agree with Mrs. Perceval, who said his faculties were failing. My father was little more than sixty, and although he was old for his years, this assertion was a cruel falsehood.

It was a bitter grief to me that I could no longer lavish on him the loving attention which had formerly been so beneficial. But my presence seemed disagreeable to him, and he avoided me. If I was alone with him, it was in vain that I tried to draw him into the affectionate and confidential intercourse once so dear. He would listen to me for a moment, and then go away, or

else relapse into reverie. I shed many a tear over his undeserved coldness, but I could not dare to ask the reason. What could have taken place during the winter which I had spent away from him? What had my father to blame me for? Why had I lost his confidence and affection?

The thought of René was a support in my hours of sadness. My tears ceased to flow when I looked on the bunch of forget-me-nots, which I had carefully kept alive, and which spoke to me in eloquent language. I knew from my aunt that a decisive movement was to be made, and I waited.

Some days after René's visit, a messenger met me while I was out walking, and requested me to return home. I was much agitated by finding my uncles in the drawing-room. I recognised Mr. Francis, who on this solemn occasion had broken through his old habits and come to Daniel Ville. They had been speaking to my father, evidently, but I was at a loss to understand the troubled expression of his countenance. Mrs. Perceval looked vexed, but that did not much concern me.

"Gabrielle, will you come to my room for a moment?" said my father, in a voice whose altered tone struck me painfully;—" I want to speak to you."

I went with him. He sat down with an air of great depression, rested his elbow on his desk and his head in his hand, and gazed sadly at me.

"So you want to leave me, Gabrielle?"

I grew pale, for this reproach touched me.

"Answer me," said my father.

"To leave you, father?" I stammered out.

"Yes. I suppose the presence of the Du Bressys here has told you everything. I have no doubt that you know René's intentions;—you are aware that he asks you in marriage?"

"Would such a marriage be displeasing to you, father?"

"That is not the question;—do you love René?"

"Yes, father; but I will never marry him without your consent."

He was not listening, but had risen from his seat, and was pacing up and down the room in agitation. At length he stood still before me; his eyes were full of sadness, and his features were contracted by suffering.

"Then," he said, in a hoarse voice, "I must really—" He was silent, raised his hand to

his throat, as if the words were choking him, and let his head droop on his chest.

"Dear father," I exclaimed, taking his hands in mine, "can you be afraid to speak to your child? Oh! tell me what is the matter, I entreat you?"

"I have nothing to tell you," he replied, drawing back hastily from me. "I was a fool;—it is not for you to hear such secrets. Go and tell your uncles I wish to speak to them, and leave me alone with them."

It was a command, and I could not but obey. As I closed the door, I saw him sink down on a chair and strike his forehead with an air of despair, and I heard him murmur in a tone of anguish: "It must be done."

I gave his message to my uncles, and they went to him. At the end of a quarter of an hour they returned with unaltered countenances. My father, who had been pale, was now flushed. Some short and constrained words were said on both sides, and they went away, saying, "Tomorrow."

I went up to my room in dreadful disquietude. What barrier was being raised between René and me? What was the revelation from which my father had shrunk? What had passed in the

mysterious interview, whose result was of such moment to me? I did not see my father again that day; he did not join the evening meal, and Mrs. Perceval gave me clearly to understand that I was not to be admitted into his room. All hope of the explanation I longed for was thus at an end; but my compassion for his distress was so deep that, at much cost to my own feelings, I respected his wishes.



XVII.



DID not venture to go myself on the morrow and ask tidings of him. Far into the night I had heard his step on

the floor of his room; he had not gone to bed till very late. Dinner was nearly over when at last he appeared. He looked pale and harassed, and started nervously at every sound. He did not say a word to me, and he could not eat. While we were at dessert, Augustine came into the room; my father, in great agitation, turned towards her, as if to ask a question.

"A letter from Greenwood for you, sir," she said.

He rose from table, threw down his napkin, took the letter in his trembling hand, and left the room.

"All is over," thought I to myself;—"the affair is to be broken off."

My heart beat so violently that I also rose to

leave the room, when the door opened and my father came up to me. "Sit down, Gabrielle," said he;—"you look as if you were going to faint."

The tender, gentle tone of his voice quite touched my heart, and I looked up at him. His fine countenance was now beaming with joy. All my past and present impressions at once gave place to the greatest astonishment.

"I promised a decided answer to-day, my child," said he. "Since this marriage pleases you, I may send our united consent, may I not?"

By way of answer I could but throw my arms round his neck. He pressed me to his heart, and said: "You will be happy, dear child;—René has a noble heart."

He left the room, and I remained alone with Mrs. Perceval, who smiled ironically, but appeared to be very angry.

"What a pity that I am the only witness of such a touching scene!" she said. "Charles' extraordinary conduct prevents me from indulging in all the sentiment appropriate to the occasion. Really, I don't know if he is quite in his right mind;—the same thing that makes him miserable one day, delights him the next."

"It is a serious thing for a father to decide the future of his children," I replied, gravely;— "no wonder that he should have been anxious and troubled."

"Come now! do you mean to go on with this sentimentality? You seem glad enough to escape from paternal authority, spite of all your high-flown phrases," said my stepmother, sneeringly.

A sharp answer was on my lips, but I repressed it, and answered, quietly: "Every girl likes to have her future decided. I am useless to my father, since he has you, and I could not have made a happier choice: René is the best of men."

"And the most homely;—but you have wit enough for both. The thing that surprises me is Mr. Perceval's oddity. Did he not tell you anything?"

"No ;-I thought you knew--"

"I know nothing;—your father does not favour me with his ideas. Indeed, the agreeable things he used to say made me beg him, once for all, to keep his grievances to himself. Is it my fault—that he—— Well, it seems that I am catching the unconnected way of speaking which he has lately adopted."

She was silent, and I went away. All the rest of that day she was nervous, ill-natured, and snappish, but my father continued calm. He walked up and down the avenue, waiting for René, whose visits were now formally authorised. René arrived late in the evening, and almost as soon as we were seated in the drawing-room he asked my father's permission to present me with my betrothal ring. He then produced a little case, opened it, and gave me a ring; it was a plain gold hoop, with a beautiful pearl.

"This ring has been for a long time in our family, Gabrielle," he said: "I value it much, for it was my mother's favourite ornament."

I thanked him by a look, and slipped the ring on my finger; it fitted me perfectly. I then showed it to Mrs. Perceval, who was very silent, on the pretext of a headache. She thought the pearl magnificent, but did not approve of the setting, and advised me to have it altered.

René looked at me, and I guessed his thoughts. I put the ring back on my finger, and said that to change the setting would deprive the pearl of its chief value as a souvenir, and that I liked it as it was. My father agreed with me, and Mrs. Perceval relapsed into silence.

René told us that Uncle Felix was obliged at

once to leave home for some time. His mother's last surviving brother was on his death-bed, and had sent for him. Our marriage would not take place until his return.

My father asked René to stay, and he spent all the evening with us. My stepmother, spite of her headache, remained with us, but she said not a word. She thought that her presence interfered with the freedom of our intercourse, and therefore she would not retire to her own room.

But we talked on, and were busily making plans for our future, when I thought I heard the sound of wheels in the courtyard.

Mrs. Perceval listened. Confused sounds reached our ears through the closed shutters. All at once we heard a light, quick step, the door was opened, and a lady, enveloped in a mass of warm clothing, and wearing a thick woollen veil over her face, came into the room.

"Sara!" exclaimed Mrs. Perceval, hastening to meet her.

"Yes, indeed; Sara herself," answered a young, fresh voice. "Did you not expect me, Ellen? Stop, sister; you must embrace me by-and-by, for really I am smothered with such a load of wraps. Take them off;—oh, do! Just look how they have muffled me up!"

Two little gloved hands helped my stepmother; cloaks, bonnet, and veil all fell to the floor; and Sara, gliding out of her travelling garments, like a butterfly from the chrysalis, stood before us in her pretty morning-dress, and with her hair floating over her shoulders. She embraced her sister and then my father, courtesied gracefully and deeply to René, and turning to me, threw back her fair curls, and, looking at me, said: "I beg your pardon, but are you Gabrielle?"

"Yes."

We kissed each other cordially.

"Oh, what a long, tiresome journey it has been!" continued Sara, turning again to her sister. "Poor Betsy!—but how stupid I am! I never told you that she had come with me."

"Who has come with you, Sara?" asked my father.

"Betsy—Cousin Betsy;—I had quite forgotten her. When I saw the carriage door open, I jumped out, and here I am."

My father went out, and Mrs. Perceval began to talk to Sara in a low voice. René and I watched them. Leaning towards her sister, who was seated, Sara listened, tapping the velvet cushion with her white taper fingers; her face had a little look of mischief and impatience which contrasted greatly with Mrs. Perceval's serious expression.

When Sara left St. Mary's she was but a pretty child; now I beheld her grown into a young girl. She was small, but her little figure was perfect. Her hair fell in heavy curls on her swan-like neck; her dress was cut square, and through the thin muslin fabric the round white shoulders were visible; her brow was open; her large, well-set blue eyes were framed by chestnut eyelashes and eyebrows; her rosy, childish mouth disclosed, under the influence of the constant smile which made two dimples in her cheeks, the prettiest set of teeth. The perfect, harmonious features were accompanied by one of those beautifully fresh and dazzling complexions only to be seen in earliest youth. You would have said she was sixteen: a very spring-flower, radiant in its charm and beauty.

My father did not return for five minutes, and when he did he brought on his arm the tallest, driest, plainest person I ever saw. Mrs. Perceval went forward eagerly to meet her, and Sara sprang to my side.

"I have been scolded," she said, smiling. "Ellen does not like delay in the fulfilment of promises, and she confesses that a few weeks

later I should not have been at all welcome." And seeing that I was bowing, she turned round. "Oh, there you are, Betsy! Gabrielle, let me have the pleasure of introducing to you my excellent cousin, Miss Betsy Carpton;—Bet, this is Miss Perceval."

Miss Betsy's large face brightened with a smile which displayed to my view a formidable set of teeth.

"Most happy," she said, with a strong English accent; -- "most happy to make your acquaintance. I will ask to go to my room, Ellen; my travelling dress is not fit to be seen."

Miss Betsy had probably enjoyed a good nap during the journey, and her bonnet had suffered seriously; the crown was sunken, and her long face was surmounted by an angle, while her dishevelled ringlets streamed down her cheeks.

Mrs. Perceval conducted her to her room. Sara had taken my father's arm, and was accompanying him in his walk up and down the drawing-room, relating meanwhile, with much laughter, the various incidents of her journey.

"How unfortunate to have strangers here just now!" observed René, in a tone of vexation.

"But, indeed, we shall not now have Mrs. Perceval always with us, and always looking out-of-sorts. She will be taken up with her sister, and will leave us more to ourselves."

"Perhaps you are right, Gabrielle."

"And, besides, I am very glad to see dear little Sara again. Is she not very engaging?"

"Do you think so?" said he, not very gallantly; and looking at the clock, he added: "I must be off;—good-bye till to-morrow."

We shook hands; he bowed to Sara, and left the room with my father.

Sara, seating herself beside me, then inquired: "Who is that young man, Gabrielle? I require you to tell me."

"Mr. René du Bressy."

"What matter about his name? I want to know his nature;—is he a neighbour, a lover, a swain?"

"A cousin, Sara."

"Only a cousin?" she said, in a droll manner.

"But one may love one's cousins, Sara."

"That is just as it happens. I have a great big cousin, an Englishman, as tall as the column of Vendome, as stupid as an owl, and as red as if he had been in the fire. He is like Betsy, only he has a yellow moustache to hide his teeth. Well, this charming cousin wants to marry me, and I have said No, decidedly, in French and in English."

"But perhaps he has good qualities to make up for his appearance?"

"I know nothing of that; I only know that I don't like him, and I have gained my point. He is only a younger son, too, though he has great expectations. Now let us talk about St. Mary's. We must go together and pay a visit to our old convent, if you like;—we shall find so many memories of old times there. By-the-bye, let me ask you a question: have you grown bad again?"

"Oh, Sara! can you doubt the sincerity of my improvement? You used to believe in it."

"Indeed, I was greatly surprised, and I said that--"

"What did you say, Sara?"

"Nothing. I don't know why I ask you such odd questions. I am delighted to see you; I have always loved you; I believe you are good and reasonable;—once for all, I say so. I am not very wicked myself—at least, I don't mean to be—yet sometimes I tease horribly. Poor

Betsy knows it, to her cost. She is formal, and fidgety, and tiresome, like all old Englishwomen; but she is good. Well, I have not spared her; I have tormented her in ever so many ways during that tiresome journey. When we stopped to change horses, I ate all the bread and butter she had prepared for us both. I told her that Richardson's novels were all nonsense, and she is quite devoted to the author of 'Clarissa Harlowe,' I told her all manner of pranks, for the simple pleasure of hearing her exclaim, 'shocking!' And at last, when she had been asleep for awhile, she feared that her bonnet was out of shape, and asked me to settle it: I made three corners instead of two, which it had before. Is that outrageous conduct?"

I laughed, and indeed my self-command was sorely tasked when Miss Betsy reappeared with a maraboot feather on her chignon. We had tea, and Sara chatted merrily. Mrs. Perceval had suddenly recovered, and listened with smiles. Miss Betsy drank an immense quantity of tea, and at every mouthful stroked her chest with her left hand, showing us plainly that the perfumed beverage was grateful to her interior.

I spent a pleasant evening, but that night I dreamt that I was being married with maraboot feathers in my hair, and that my teeth were so long that the ceremony was interrupted, for I had tried to bite Sara, who was laughing.



XVIII.

HE following morning, while all the rest of the household were still asleep, I wrote to Aunt Desirée and to Mother

Saint Louis to announce my marriage. I did not see Miss Betsy or Sara till luncheon. Sara was refreshed and blooming, but Miss Betsy seemed poorly. René came in the afternoon. It was oppressively hot; nevertheless, Sara wished to take a walk. Mrs. Perceval, fearing the effects of the sun on her complexion, remained at home with Miss Betsy. My vanity, unfortunately, led me to put on a small bonnet, instead of the broad-brimmed hat I generally wore. Little did I foresee the results of this weakness.

We walked for a long time under a burning sun, from which I was very insufficiently protected by my gauze veil; accordingly, when I returned home I had a bad headache from a sun-stroke on my neck and checks. I was obliged to go to bed at once. I suffered much from my head all night, and by morning my face was greatly swollen. My father sent at once for the doctor, and just as the messenger was starting René arrived. He seemed shocked at hearing of my illness, and waited at Daniel Ville till the doctor came, installing himself bravely in the drawing-room, between Mrs. Perceval, who said nothing, and Miss Betsy, who said too much. These particulars I learned from Sara.

He was the first to ask the doctor's opinion, and my father informed him that I had a good deal of fever and was threatened with erysipelas in the head, but that my condition was not in any way alarming.

Sara remained with me. "What an unfortunate illness this is!" she observed. "I thought I should have had such delightful rides and walks with you. Ellen told me this morning that Mr. René is a very good horseman, and would give me lessons in riding."

Here she was called away, but almost immediately she returned, exclaiming: "How delightful! Ellen has been asking Mr. René to spare us an hour just now, and he says he is ready. Will you let me ride your horse?"

I made a sign of consent; she thanked me, bid me good-bye, and went off. My father, who had never left me, now thought I was going to sleep, and gently went out of the room, and I was alone with Miss Betsy, who had appointed herself nurse. The kind creature had the best possible intentions, and did all she could to amuse me. She told me her brother's history, her sister's history, and her own history, in which last a certain nobleman played an important part. Alas! notwithstanding all that she implied of her Edward's devotion, I could not but imagine from her candid account that she had been the victim of an illusion. When she had exhausted all possible topics of conversation, she proposed to read to me, and I immediately consented, thinking that my want of interest would be less observed, and have less appearance of discourtesy. She went away, and soon returned with an armful of gray volumes.

"These are all one work," she said;—"it is the very interesting story of Sir Charles Grandison, a true gentleman, whose counterpart I knew well." And she sighed as she thought of her Edward.

"When you are tired, dear Miss Betsy, pray stop. I should be so sorry to be a trouble to you." "I am never tired of Richardson, my dear; he is so happy in his descriptions of the sentiment which always charms a tender heart."

And Miss Betsy, with her tender heart, opened the book, and began to read with a voice and an accent whose strange monotony I cannot describe. She was still reading when the other ladies returned from their ride. Sara came in with her riding-whip in her hand.

"We have had a charming ride," she said. "Mr. René is a first-rate escort, and Fergus is a dear little horse. How are you, Gabrielle?"

"Better;—that is, I have not so much pain; but I think my head is getting more and more swollen."

"Yes, indeed, your eyes can't be seen, and your face is so odd. Do you know, I had hard work to make your cousin at all cheerful;—he missed you, dear, and he seemed to be quite lost in his dreams."

My father came in at this moment; René wanted to hear the latest report of my health before returning to Greenwood.

I was in bed for a week, and confined to my room room for three. In the morning Mrs. Perceval and Sara, especially Sara, kept me company. In the

afternoon I listened to the interminable and really interesting story of Sir Charles Grandison. My father often visited me; he was again becoming absent in manner, but he was always kind and affectionate to me. Sara's gaiety amused me to the greatest degree, and I grew fonder of her every day. Her talk and her lively spirits made the mornings pass quickly, and often she returned to my room in the afternoon, saying she would take Miss Carpton's place. She would talk a great deal of nonsense, make fun of Betsy, read a page, taste my barley-water or lemonade, and go off at her sister's first summons. promising to come back and never keeping the promise. René used to call every day, and Mrs. Perceval, grateful no doubt for his kind attention as an escort in the daily rides, always urged me to see him. I excused myself on the score of propriety, but really my looking-glass counselled delay. My head was less swelled, but my face was still very red, and the right side was larger than the left. This produced an appalling effect. My swelled cheek pushed my mouth and the end of my nose to the left, and my beautiful appearance may be imagined. I would see no visitor except my Uncle Francis. I was alone when he came, and he seemed glad of it. As it was our first private interview, he took occasion to express the happiness which his nephew's choice had given him.

"I never forgot the little girl who came to take refuge at Greenwood, and who showed us such confiding friendship. I was glad to learn that now as a woman, she consents to come and cheer our sad house. Though we did not show it, we took the deepest interest in this affair. A giddy, capricious, worldly woman would be out of place at Greenwood, and would be unhappy there. But we lest René free; it is best to have no mistakes in such affairs, as I know better than most people, since my life was blighted by the inconstancy of her to whom I had devoted my whole being. You remind me of her, Gabrielle," he said, with a sigh; -- "yes, when you look at me I see her glance; and no wonder, for the only love of my youth was your mother."

"But, uncle, I cannot be like my mother; they say she was very pretty."

"Oh, beautiful! I cannot say that you have her features, but in your figure, your carriage, your expression, and your smile, there is something that brings her before me wonderfully. I saw it, even, when you were a little child; now, no one who knew your mother could fail to observe it."

We talked on for awhile, and he asked my opinion regarding some alterations which were being made at Greenwood. When Miss Betsy appeared, he rose to go, saying: "René is much grieved at your refusal to see him. You have received my visit, why not let him come?"

"Would it not be very imprudent?" said I, in jest;—"you see how disfigured I am. What if my lover were to think me ugly, and break off our engagement."

My uncle, who seldom made a joke, answered with a seriousness much in contrast with my tone: "The most sacred feelings are not to be treated so lightly, my dear child. If for any possible reason René were to break his solemn word, I would cut him off and never see him again."

I assured my uncle that I had not spoken in earnest, and that my confidence in René's affection and honour was perfect.

This was literally true, and if I longed to see him again, it was not from any fear of being forgotten. The day that I was first allowed to go to the drawing-room he came earlier than usual on purpose to see me. I was waiting for him, and meanwhile preparing some leather with which I meant to finish a chandelier ornament

I had begun at Rosevale. René had helped me in this work, and intended himself to hang it up in the drawing-room at Greenwood, so that I might see it there on my arrival. I had gone on with it during my days of enforced seclusion, and now only a few flowers were wanted: René used to mark the veins on the leaves, and I had left them to him to finish. My heart beat fast when I heard the gallop of his horse, and Sara asked me why my colour changed so suddenly. This question brought it back to my cheeks, and I had nearly got over my emotion when René came in. In my delight at seeing him I did not at first observe that he appeared somewhat ill at ease. After many inquiries about my health, he began his work; but often I observed that he looked furtively towards the door, and I fancied that, like myself, he was hoping that Miss Betsy would go and leave us alone with my father.

We were all three hard at work, and I even thought that, considering the occasion, René was somewhat too deeply absorbed in his wreaths, when the door opened, and Sara appeared in her riding-habit. The close-fitting black dress showed off the beautiful fairness of her skin, the round hat, pushed down on her

forehead, made her look like a handsome boy, and with every movement her long white feather waved on her golden tresses.

"Why do you seem so surprised at my appearance?" she asked René. "Is that the way a man forgets his duties, and is it polite to keep ladies waiting?"

"I did not think we were going to ride today," he answered, meekly.

"And, pray, why not? The weather is perfect, and Ellen has quite made up her mind to go. To-morrow, Gabrielle, you will be with us;—how pleasant that will be! But come, Mr. René, do make haste."

René hesitated. He was quite willing to obey, but he felt that it was not fair to give to others an hour due to me. He looked at me; but his strange hesitation had irritated me; a vague fear came over me, and I looked steadily down. I would not let him read in my eyes a petition, a command, or a reproach: his own heart was to give the answer, and I awaited it in secret anguish.

"Well," said Sara, imperiously, with a shake of her whip, "will you make up your mind, one way or other? Gabrielle, he is looking at you for leave to get up. Do grant it at once, I beg, for this is my last ride on Fergus, and I don't want to lose a moment of it."

"My cousin has no need of my permission to do to-day what he has done every day, Sara," said I, with forced calmness.

"But perhaps you have set him a task of work. Still, come, Mr. René. When I come back I will help Gabrielle, and make up for the time you lose on my account."

She went towards the door, and René rose.

"I shall not be long away, Gabrielle," he said, in some embarrassment; "but I can't, in conscience, let the ladies ride alone. Good-bye, for a little while."

He followed Sara. I seemed rooted to my place, but presently I went to the window to see them start.

Mrs. Perceval and Sara were waiting in the yard; presently the groom came out of the stable with Sting, and helped my stepmother to mount; then René came, leading Miss Flora, carparisoned with a lady's saddle and decorated with blue ribbons at her ears. He led her up to Sara, held her with one hand, while Sara, putting her little foot in the other, sprang to the saddle with her habitual grace. Fergus was next led out, and René mounted him and

followed the horsewomen without a single glance at the house where his sorrowful and jealous betrothed remained. Jealous! Yes, I was jealous, and a trifling incident gave fresh fuel to the dreadful fire, which like that said to have burned the centaur's robe, burns on as long as there is anything to be consumed.

When I was at Rosevale I had often told René I should like, at least for once, to change horses with him. He had very reasonably replied that Fergus was too small for him, and that with his long legs he would look very ridiculous on a little horse. Now he sacrificed his self-love for another, though he had refused to do it for me.

I was very miserable, and finding some excuse for leaving my work, I went to my room and shut myself in. It was well that I did so, for soon I heard Miss Betsy call me. It was time for our reading; I let her knock at my door in vain. I cared little for Miss Byron's sorrows, my own were quite enough for me, and I wished at least to have the melancholy satisfaction of brooding over them. I blamed Mrs. Perceval, and also Sara, who had come just in time to hinder my happiness. I blamed myself. Why had I not been more prudent, or rather, less con-

fiding? The sight of the forget-me-nots, which even my illness had not made me neglect, and which were only now beginning to fade, did something to calm me. The little flowers seemed to tell me that René would not be unfaithful to his promise. By degrees I persuaded myself that I had been too hasty in taking alarm; that, after all, Sara was only a playful child, and was not likely to win the reasonable attachment of a sensible man. Perhaps I had falsely interpreted an action due merely to René's obliging disposition. I let my thoughts follow this line, but resolved not to be too blindly secure. I did not like to accuse my future husband, but I had much to fear from Mrs. Perceval. Her displeasure at hearing of my approaching marriage, Sara's sudden arrival, the reproaches for her delay, the daily rides which must have been dreadfully fatiguing: all these things made me feel that my stepmother was darkly weaving a plot against my happiness. Her sister was poor, but she was beautiful and most attractive, while I-

I looked at the mirror; my eyes were red with weeping, and I was quite ugly. I did my best to wash away the traces of my tears. The observations which I had determined to make, in order to ascertain the truth, neces-

sitated an appearance of ignorance. So, when I thought myself sufficiently restored to my ordinary appearance I went back to the drawing-room, and in company with my father and Miss Betsy, with a steadfast though wounded heart, awaited the return of the riding party.



XIX.

AVE you ever happened to watch the descent of some adventurous boy from the top of an old wall, where he has climbed in search of nests? His feet feel for any inequality of surface, his hands catch at any possible support, he holds on to anything. If a foot slip, he places it on another stone; if the ivy-root break in his hand, he seizes a tuft of grass: somewhat similar to these efforts were those by which I thought to stay my fall into the abyss which had swallowed up my happiness. I tried everything, and everything, alas! failed me. First I thought I must have been mistaken. René, believing me to be on my guard. became very careful; but by degrees his watchfulness was diminished, and then began my hourly torture. Not that he manifested to Sara the tender and cordial affection which had been mine. In her presence he was timid, but his

eyes followed every movement she made, and when she was out of his sight he became pensive and absent. He avoided being alone with me, and his frank expression had vanished. I could not but see the meaning of all this.

The time which had been mentioned for our marriage was drawing near, but nothing was said about the event. My father's gloom had returned, and he often left home. Mrs. Perceval had been entrusted with the direction of my trousseau, but she made no preparations whatever. Uncle Felix, indeed, was still away, and we should necessarily have waited for his return to fix the wedding-day.

In the midst of the undefined discomfort which weighed upon all, Sara's childish mirth continued; she made fun of my gravity, attacked René for his silence, and with many pretty tricks endeavoured to amuse my father, who was so unobservant that he saw nothing and guessed nothing.

René, more and more smitten with her beauty, undoubtedly regretted that he was not free. Sara was just the woman who showed to the greatest possible advantage as compared with me. Her very ordinary intelligence suited my cousin's self-love. He felt that he was superior

to this very ignorant young girl, who could ask his opinion with the most engaging simplicity. And then he felt a charm, as yet unknown to him, in the influence of her wonderful beauty. He perceived that, compared with her, I was plain, and his heart was captivated by means of his eyes.

"In the bottom of his heart he loves me," I used to say to myself, bitterly;—"this is a passing fancy. Some day he will regret his blindness, but it will be too late for us both."

An explanation became absolutely necessary on both sides; this uncertainty could not continue. I suddenly resolved to speak, and I made up my mind to take the first opportunity that might offer of plainly asking him the burning question that rose to my lips. That very day I went out alone to consider the means of carrying my purpose into effect. Deep in thought, I wandered on by chance till I came to the edge of the pond, which was bordered by thick elmhedges with passages cut in them. I entered one of these covered ways, and looking through it saw Mrs. Perceval and Miss Betsy seated beneath a service-tree. Sara was perched on the rugged trunk of a weeping willow which hung over the water; and with her two hands

resting on a thick branch, she swung to and fro, and amused herself by bending the end of the branch down into the pond, that she might see it rebound all dripping with water. An instinctive, rather than intentional, vanity always led her to take any opportunity of gaining admiration. Who else would ever have thought of swinging like a child on the branch of a willowtree? In this strange position her slight figure swayed with the movement of the branch; her rosy face was half hid beneath the fresh green leaves; and her arms, from which the sleeves fell back as she swung to and fro, were bare to the elbow. René, at the foot of the tree, was gazing at her, and I read his admiration in his eyes. But the silly girl leant too hard, a crack was heard, her blue dress touched the water. and a cry of fear burst forth. This was from René's lips; he rushed forward, but Sara had already regained her footing on the trunk of the tree. He seemed to beg her to come away. She shook her head, and I could hear her peals of laughter. At last his eloquence prevailed, her laughter ceased, and refusing his proffered assistance, she stood still for a second, and then sprang lightly to the bank.

Mrs. Perceval and Miss Betsy had risen from

their seat. Sara took her sister's arm and drew her on. As they were going to the upper terrace, they seemed likely to take the path outside the tunnel in which I was ensconced. I therefore decided to let Mrs. Perceval and Sara pass, and to stop René.

A rustling of dresses intimated the presence of the two sisters. They were walking quickly, and had, it may be on purpose, left René and Miss Betsy at some distance.

"Do look, Ellen," said Sara, gaily, "how he follows Miss Betsy with his downcast, absent look. Anyone would think that he is repenting what he has just said to me."

"I don't think that is likely," said Mrs. Perceval, with a laugh which made my heart sick.

"He is so timid," said Sara.

"Yet the declaration he has just made to you shows some courage, I confess. You have quite turned the poor fellow's head."

Sara's next words fell on my ear as an unmeaning sound. I could not understand them, for I was stunned. The proof that I had both sought and feared was before me. He had proposed. He passed by but I did not attempt to stop him. I hastily took a little side path, ran to the house, and sought refuge in my own room. I was trembling with emotion; my eyes were dry, for anger was even stronger than sorrow. I had never felt so many bad passions working in my breast. I crushed the flowers that had been so tenderly cherished; I snatched from my hand the golden ring, pledge of a vanished sentiment; and seating myself at my desk, in feverish haste I wrote the following words:

"Send for me at once, dear aunt. René is false: he loves my stepmother's sister. I cannot bear the sight of her, nor of Mrs. Perceval, who glories in the success of her horrid plots."

I wrote to Greenwood in much the same terms. There—vengeance was at hand; my letter was the match to be put to the barrel of gunpowder; there would be a terrible explosion. I imagined it all, and with set teeth and inflamed countenance rose from my chair. I looked by chance at the mirror; the passion and hatred expressed in my face startled and alarmed me. I was ashamed and afraid of myself, and, touched with a sudden remorse, I fell on my knees and prayed for pardon for that moment of wickedness. Prayer softened my heart, which had been, as it were, pressed in a vice by the violence of my grief. I burst into tears. I remained for a long time weeping and praying, pouring forth at

the Feet of my crucified Redeemer the overwhelming sorrow that was breaking my heart. Hatred and passion vanished from my soul as the tears flowed from my eyes, and the tempest was calmed. When that Christian virtue called resignation takes its place by the side of suffering, it gives it a value which is its only alleviation.

There was still a sacrifice to be made. For the sake of René's happiness I must give him back his liberty, and take upon myself the responsibility of an act which shattered all my hopes of happiness. My prayers for strength to be generous to the end were interrupted by the voice of Sara singing out my name with many turns and variations.

I rose from my knees in fear. I must not let her see me in my present state; it would be quite unworthy of me. To keep my door locked was no defence when Sara was concerned; she would have continued calling and knocking, and would ultimately have had it burst open. So I gently drew back the bolt, and hid myself behind a curtain hung up to keep my dresses from dust. The door soon opened.

"Not come in yet!" said Sara. "I will go and look for Gabrielle, who is taking a walk without us," she added, in a louder voice, speaking to someone in the drawing-room.

So she left the room, and I proceeded to rewrite my letters, with shame and grief for the uncontrolled feeling expressed in those I now destroyed. It was difficult enough to know what to say, for I did not wish to blame René. After many attempts, I decided that the best reason I could give for breaking off the engagement was the unsuitability of our characters. Closer acquaintance had weakened instead of strengthening our affection, and I had become convinced that our happiness would be in danger.

Since we had been bound by a promise to each other I had loved René less, and he had found less pleasure in my society than formerly. It was, therefore, natural that, by mutual consent, our connection should be severed before it became indissoluble.

As my father was not at home, I took upon myself to send a messenger to Greewood with my letter. I was anxious to bring the matter to an end, and as he had the right to know the whole truth, I felt no doubt of his approval of the course I was taking.

It was now nearly time for supper, and it was impossible for me to appear with my tell-tale

countenance. I was considering how to escape from this difficulty, when Miss Betsy came into my room. Shocked with my appearance, she drew back, saying: "My dear! what is the matter?"

"A pain in my eyes," was my prompt reply. "When I was out a branch of a rose-tree struck my face. I have been bathing my eyes—you see my cheeks are quite moist—but it does no good. My eyelids are burning, and I feel quite ill."

"Perhaps there is something in one of your eyes," suggested the kind old lady, "and that might be very dangerous. Let me look;—which eve is it?"

"The right, I think."

"Let us see," said Miss Betsy, and delicately raising the eyelid, she began her examination. "I see nothing—nothing at all. Turn your eye, please; pray look up. Oh! now I see something—an imperceptible thorn."

She looked at this thorn, visible only to the eye of faith, and then went for a marvellous lotion, which she considered to be an unfailing remedy for all maladies of the eye.

When she came back I let her bathe and even bandage my eye. With my face tied up, I had

a good reason for my absence from supper, and that reason was the very thing I had wanted.

Miss Betsy told everyone of the accident which I had met with. Mrs. Perceval and Sara came to inquire for me, and found me in bed. I said I had also a headache, and the matter was explained.

Sara laughed at Miss Betsy's treatment, and at the patience with which I endured it. I thought she was going to spend the whole evening in my room, but her presence was too painful to my deeply-wounded feelings, and I feigned sleep in order to be left alone.

In the morning Miss Betsy was the first to visit me, and was extremely gratified at my complete recovery, due, she maintained, to her famous remedy. She left the room, carrying with her the precious bottle, and I went to speak to my father, who had just returned.

I told him of my resolution, accounting for it by the same reasons with which I had endeavoured to satisfy my uncle and my aunt.

Little was I prepared for his manner of receiving my announcement. He began by positively forbidding me to act on, what he called, an incomprehensible caprice, by speaking of it to any other person. And when I told him

that my uncle and my aunt were aware of the state of things, he became extremely angry. Considering the manner in which he had at first received the proposal, I had no reason to think that my marriage was a matter of such importance to him, and I listened with a kind of terror to the reproaches which, in a tone of despair, he heaped on the weakness and inconstancy of my character.

"Just like women!" he exclaimed;—" everything suffers from their capricious temper; they trifle with all our feelings."

"But, father, I assure you that my resolution is not in any way due to caprice."

"Then give me some reason, some sensible reason, for your refusal. Yesterday you loved René; now you reject him. What does it mean? Do you really wish to drive me to despair by your conduct, and is your love of contradiction so great that you must give up a thing just because it makes your father happy? God knows, I am not often happy, and that it is sad to feel that the last blow is struck by my own daughter."

"No, father; do not speak thus to me, I pray; do not accuse me," I exclaimed, with tears.

"Your peace and your happiness are more to me than my own."

"Then do not destroy them by this change. Let me go to Greenwood and withdraw your refusal, and retrace your foolish step, if there be still time."

"Ask me anything but that. It is quite impossible."

"And why? For goodness' sake, explain these contradictions! Do you not love René?"

"I love him still, father, and I can never love another man as I have loved him; but he rejects me, he insults me, he loves me no more. He loves another."

My father looked hard at me. "Who is this other?" he asked.

"Sara."

He was silent. I told him of my suspicions, of my anxiety, and finally of the scene I had witnessed on the previous evening. My tears flowed fast as I spoke, and proved the truth of my words.

"Forgive me, Gabrielle," he said, taking my hand, "and do not cry. Poor child! how could I accuse you and be so hard on you? I am grieved to the heart, for I know how you must have suffered. Are you to pay for your poor

mother's fault and for my fault? René will be none the happier, for perjury is a heavy load, and the sorrows of Francis du Bressy cost my Gabrielle many a tear. But I speak of things you do not know. Let us consider the matter seriously. I will come to an understanding with Ellen: for I cannot believe that she was blind to all that was going on and destroying your happiness; women generally see such things at once. Let us wait for René's answer: I still hope that he acted hastily, and that your letter to his uncle will bring him to himself. It is not possible that he is really in love with that silly, capricious child. I ask you only one thing: if he should regret his momentary folly and forgetfulness, and should really wish to renew his engagement to you-if, in fact, he gives Sara up—then accept his repentance. If you really love him, your heart will teach you to be merciful, and he will be grateful. Can you promise me this?"

"Yes, father," I frankly answered, "I do promise. If he does appear penitent, if he does not really love Sara, as he certainly seems to do, then, for your sake, I will make no objection to our union."

"Thanks, Gabrielle; I have reasons, very

serious reasons, for desiring this marriage, which will secure your future. For my sake, be careful and prudent."

He kissed me, and I went away, determined to follow his advice, however much it might cost my self-love, and although I was ignorant of his reasons for so ardently desiring the accomplishment of my marriage with René. With some impatience I awaited the arrival of my faithless lover.

After all, there lingered in the depths of my heart a sort of hope, and I was loth to eradicate it till my sorrow should be fully confirmed by René's definite renunciation of his promise. By chance, and, as I thought, most fortunately, I was alone in the drawing-room when he came. He accosted me with hesitation, embarrassment, and blushes; but I longed for something better than mere shame on his part.

If he had seemed vexed, or even irritated, I should gladly have acted in accordance with my father's advice. As it was, his humiliation only proved his guilt, and I received him with a coldness which made him yet more ill at ease.

"I am glad to find you alone, Gabrielle," he observed, in an uncertain tone.

"I am not sorry for it either," said I. "I have

often wished for such an opportunity; we have both kept silence too long."

"What do you mean? And I am really to consider your letter to my uncle, which deeply grieves him, as your final decision?"

"I am glad to see that the grief affects your uncle only," I answered, bitterly. "I do not reproach you, Mr. René; I merely remark the fitness of the step I have taken."

"Gabrielle, you are cruel. I am very unhappy—upon my honour, I am. I beg of you to delay, but not to break off everything. I do not know what can have made you think that—that——"

"Be candid, sir, and admit that I must have been smitten with blindness not to see that you regretted our engagement. Besides, I know everything, and the moment you made your declaration of sentiments, which were an insult to me, I looked on myself as liberated from any promise."

René grew crimson when he saw that I was aware of what had passed between him and Sara; but he did not venture to deny it.

"You now know the real cause of my refusal. I have thought it right to conceal it from my uncle; for one day he said that if ever you

should prove a perjurer, he would disinherit you. I do not wish misfortune or ruin to anyone. My conscience tells me that I should never have acted thus towards you, and that is enough for me. Be happy with another, and forget that we have ever been more than cousins. Here is your mother's ring; I have no longer any right to wear it, and it again becomes your property."

At this moment Mrs. Perceval entered the room. He took the ring mechanically from my hand, and rose to address my stepmother. I presently left them.

On the morrow Mr. Du Bressy called on me; he seemed much distressed by my determination, and vainly endeavoured to induce me to alter it. My father urged me to be kind, as if kindness could restore to me a heart which was no longer mine.

Several days passed. René did not come to Daniel Ville; and one Sunday, on my return from Mass, which Mrs. Perceval rarely attended, on account of the earliness of the hour at which it was said, I found a letter in my room. I opened it and read it with some emotion, for I had recognised René's handwriting. It was as follows:

"Spite of your refusal, your coldness, and

your scorn, I cannot look on your determination as irrevocable, my dear Gabrielle, nor allow that all is at an end between us. You will not, perhaps, believe me; but I cannot bear such a thought. I do not know how to explain what is now passing in my mind; but be pitiful, and have mercy on a poor wretch who does not himself know what he wishes. My heart and my imagination are in conflict. Why have I unconsciously let this strange feeling that enthrals me gain such power?

"My eyes have been fascinated certainly. But does that imply that I have made up my mind to a choice which reason loudly condemns? No, truly not. I do not now ask that our marriage should take place; I am not at this moment worthy of you, and I will never be guilty of presumption. But I entreat you to suspend your decision. Let me put myself to the test, let me remove from my heart the tempting image that has come between us. She will doubtless leave Daniel Ville, and I will forget her. I will try to forget her, so that I may think only of the one who has been, and who still is, so dear to me.—RENE."

I read this strange letter attentively, I weighed

each word, and I became convinced that René was deceiving himself when he talked of overcoming his passion for Sara. I answered, saying that he must consider himself perfectly free, and that I would look to the future to show what might be the constancy of his feeling for Sara.

I repeated that all was at an end between us, adding that I forgave his fickleness, and cherished no resentment on account of his conduct.

"Now," thought I, "we shall see who wins the day. If he is in good faith, this letter will make him feel that, should his passion for Sara not survive absence, he will find me ready to grant a free pardon."

I went to the drawing-room, where the other ladies were sitting. Sara was talking of René, and wondering why he did not come.

"You must blame Gabrielle for that," said Mrs. Perceval, with a malicious smile.

"What! can it be your fault?" asked Sara, hastily. "What have you done to your poor cousin?"

"Ask Mrs. Perceval," I replied, somewhat coolly;—"she has thought fit to make an accusation; no doubt she will support it."

- "Well, Ellen, speak out."
- "I don't know if I have a right to do so. Will you allow me, Gabrielle?"
- "I can only repeat that, as you have assumed the right to accuse me, I cannot see why you should require my permission to finish what you have begun."
- "Will you speak intelligibly?" interrupted Sara, in impatience. "I had rather listen to Greek and Hebrew than to such obscure words. My question was a very simple one, and I repeat it, hoping you will condescend to reply without so much circumlocution. Why has Mr. René given up coming to Daniel Ville?"
- "Because Gabrielle has forbidden him," said Mrs. Perceval, confidently.
- "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Perceval; I have done nothing of the kind."
- "That is mere quibbling about words. Let us drop the subject, since it seems unpleasant to you."
- "But I want to understand this riddle," exclaimed Sara, "and I will know. Ellen, you are not given to mysteries, like Gabrielle: do tell me at once what it is all about."
- "You are really quite too curious, Sara. Would it help you at all to know that a marriage

was arranged between Gabrielle and Mr. René, and that Gabrielle has thought fit to withdraw her promise?"

Sara appeared surprised.

"Why did you withdraw it, Gabrielle?" she asked.

I was already considerably irritated by Mrs. Perceval's jesting manner. Sara's expressions of ignorance seemed to me the perfection of dissimulation and perfidy. I turned towards her and looked at her so hard that she involuntarily lowered her eyes.

"Is it for you to ask me such a question?" said I, haughtily.

Sara blushed and looked at her sister.

"Are you satisfied now?" asked Mrs. Perceval. "Do not you understand that you are accused, I really hardly know why?"

"You may know when you will, Mrs. Perceval, and I should have told you already had I not been absolutely convinced that your seeming ignorance is but a pretence."

"Pray be a little more measured in your words; I am not disposed to put up with all your ill-humour. Be jealous, if you will, but not impertinent. Come, Sara, what are you crying for, you silly child? Are you really

going to take Miss Perceval's tragical airs seriously?"

Her words were followed by a sneer, which brought angry tears to my eyes, and she went away, taking with her Sara, who kept her face buried in her handkerchief.

I saw none of the ladies again, not even Miss Betsy, for some hours. They had supper upstairs. As I was going to my room, however, I met her. She seemed very full of business, and her curls were hanging down, as they did if she moved about more than usual.

"Where are you going at such a rate, Miss Betsy?" I asked.

"I am packing up, my dear, for we start tomorrow."

"To-morrow!—why are you leaving Daniel Ville so soon?"

"Sara is quite determined to go; I don't know what she has taken into her head; Ellen could not persuade her to stay. They have had a little scene; Sara got angry, and we are going away. I have no time to lose, as you see, for Sara does not know how to settle anything;—so good-night, my dear; I wish you goodnight."

I was much perplexed by this sudden depar-

ture, but in the bottom of my heart I did not regret it. All my uncertainty would soon be at an end. When Sara was gone, would René return again to Daniel Ville?-would it be possible for him to forget her? I asked myself this question, as I laid my head on my pillow, and many pleasant imaginations were rising in my mind, when I heard a gentle knock at the door, and Sara's voice asked, "Are you asleep, Gabrielle?" I would fain have kept silence, but the fact that my candle was still burning betrayed me, so I answered. Sara came in gently in her night-dress, which made her prettier than ever; her beautiful hair fell freely over her shoulders, and the handkerchief in her hand seemed wet. She came close to me, looked at me for a moment, opened her lips without saying a word, and throwing herself on my neck, burst into tears. I was touched to the heart, and returned the caresses which she lavished on me without ceasing to weep.

"Can you forgive me, Gabrielle?" she murmured, midst her sobs;—" can you forgive me?"

"Forgive you, dear Sara! My goodness! you are not to blame. Is it any wonder that when you are so pretty and graceful, René should like you better than my ugly self?"

"Stop!" she exclaimed, kissing me;—"don't say so; I won't let you say it."

"But it is the truth; and if I had been pretty, René would not have loved you. But, I repeat, it is not your fault."

"Yes; I ought to have been more reserved towards him, since he was your betrothed. I made him come to Daniel Ville every day, because Ellen said we could not ride without him. Why did not you tell me you were engaged to him?"

"Sara! Sara! tell the truth, and confess that you knew it."

"No, I did not ;—Ellen never told me a word, nor did you, Gabrielle."

There was no mistaking Sara's sincerity, and my suspicions as to Mrs. Perceval's share in the change which had taken place in René became certainties.

"Why beg my pardon, Sara?" said I, affectionately. "What you have now told me removes all appearance of wrong from your conduct. In trying to please René, or rather in letting your ascendency over him become greater and greater, you only did what any other girl would have done in your place, as

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you did not know you were taking what belonged to another?"

"No, I assure you, I did not," answered Sara, seating herself on my bed, and putting her arm round my neck. "I was more surprised than I can say, and I never knew the harm I had unconsciously done you till you looked at me so hardly and called me Miss Sara. I am foolish, and capricious, and thoughtless, Gabrielle, but I am not wicked. Then I understood your sadness, and your bad eyes, and I admired you. If it had been the other way, and I had been the sufferer, I could never have had such patience. I am sure I should have beaten you."

And Sara closed her white fingers and threatened me with her little fist. As the conversation continued, her gaiety returned; it was a great thing for the volatile little soul to have kept to the same feelings for some hours.

"The punishment you would have inflicted would not have given back to you the heart that was no longer yours," I observed.

"No; but I should have gratified my revenge. You have none of those bad feelings, Gabrielle, and sometimes I could wish to be like you."

"Not in face, though, Sara."

"Let my face alone, pray-especially if it is

the cause of the mischief. I do not understand Mr. René;—no, I do not understand him; but you are worth a hundred times more than I am, dear; and since he has chosen you, it must have been that he loved you a little."

I stifled a sigh; Sara heard it, and kissed me, while her eyes filled with tears.

"I don't know what I am saying," she murmured;—"can one talk of such things? At any rate, my dear Gabrielle, I assure you that I am very sorry for what has happened. You are rather too grave, and too learned, and too sensible for me; but still I love you—oh, so much! You believe me, don't you? I have often thought that some day I would try to become devout and reasonable, like you; and if I stayed longer at Daniel Ville, I would have begged for your friendship—a real, lasting friendship."

Hitherto I had only looked on Sara, in the first place, as a child, sometimes a charming and sometimes a froward one; and then as a dangerous, little-loved rival. Now she let me read her heart as if it were an open book, and I felt a real affection for her, and freely forgave the involuntary faults which her frankness so fully atoned for.

"It is not too late, Sara," I said; "I freely

give it;—and yet more, if you are really destined to make René happy, I will bear no anger nor grudge against you, and I will love you none the less tenderly."

"Oh, Gabrielle, how good you are! Show me yet one more kindness, and say where you get that gentleness, which is not yours by nature, for I have seen you on the point of losing patience with Ellen?"

"Where I get it? You would not understand; for, pardon me, Sara, you are not a devout Catholic."

"It is true, and I am ashamed of myself when I get letters from St. Mary's, for I have profited so little by the dear nuns' advice. You see, my mother is a Protestant, and it is very convenient, though very foolish, to decide for oneself as to what one is to believe and to do: that is what they call private judgment, I believe. But I know nothing about it. Ellen is wiser than I am, but does not practise her religion any better."

"Sara, how lightly you speak of the most serious things in the world!"

"Don't scold, Gabrielle. Let us go back to what you were saying. I admire your unselfishness, but it won't be of any use. I don't love

your cousin, and I hope you and he will make it up."

I shook my head.

"If that is the reason you are going away, Sara, you may stay at Daniel Ville. An affection once shaken cannot easily be re-established, and whether present or absent you cannot be forgotten."

"Oh, yes, I can! It has been a whim, a fancy, a mere nothing: it will be all over in a week; and, whatever you say, I will go. I have held firm against Ellen, and we have fallen out seriously, which is a second reason for keeping my resolution. Obstinacy is one of my faults, as you must have seen. But I go with a light heart, as you forgive me, and I will not come back till you are Mrs. du Bressy."

I was going to protest against this last decision, but Sara put her hand on my lips, kissed my forehead, and vanished, smiling and saying: "Till to-morrow."

I was perplexed by this strange nature, with its mixture of frivolity and sensibility. Sara was good-hearted and charming; but could a man's happiness securely rest on one who knew no law but her own wayward will? I doubted it; and I fell asleep, reflecting that René would be sure

to suffer for his unworthy inconstancy, and to suffer through her for whom he had sacrificed me.

Miss Betsy and Sara started on the morrow. The conversation I have related had removed all resentment from my heart, and, strange to say, I could not help regretting the departure of the being who, involuntarily, had filled my cup of sorrow and bitterness to the brim.



XX.

Sara. Spleen seemed to seize on my stepmother. My father spent a great deal of his time away from home, but I never knew where he went or what he was doing. For my own part, I was very sad, not only on account of the cruel disappointment I

only on account of the cruel disappointment I had suffered, but also on account of my anxiety about my father. For his sake I stayed on at Daniel Ville, though I much wished to spend the winter with Aunt Desirée, who was never tired of inviting me.

About a week after Sara had left us, Mrs. Perceval received a letter from her. She seemed so [pleased by its contents that I supposed it must contain some agreeable tidings.

"Sara sends you her best love, Gabrielle; she will soon write to you," said my stepmother; and, after a moment's silence, carelessly added:

"Oh! I forgot to tell you that she has seen in Paris several acquaintances, amongst others a young girl called Edith, who spoke of you, and also Mr. du Bressy, I believe."

"Felix?" inquired my father.

"No; Mr. René."

I did not venture to look at my father, but I heard him leave the room with the uncertain step usual to him when agitated.

I went on with my embroidery, apparently quite calm, although the tidings rooted hope out of my heart; and if Mrs. Perceval expected to enjoy my consternation, she must have been disappointed, for I showed no sign of emotion.

A few days later I had a letter from Sara: René had proposed, and Mrs. Blondel left her a choice between him and the English cousin.

"Certainly I won't marry him unless you tell me to do so," wrote the silly child. "Say one word, Gabrielle, and I will choose my tall cousin, who seems taller, and redder, and duller than ever; for I have to settle one way or other."

I lost no time in answering her letter, and wishing her all possible happiness. The marriage was soon formally announced, and my stepmother seemed much disposed to accept the

invitation to be present, which accompanied the announcement.

"I don't know if Mr. Perceval will like the idea," she observed. "Paris brings back disagreeable associations to his mind, and just now he seems even more depressed than usual; but, in any case, nothing shall hinder me from going to my only sister's wedding."

My father came into the room just as she had finished speaking. She gave him the letter; he read it, threw it down, and took his place at table without saying a word.

This was not at all encouraging; but Mrs. Perceval, as the plan suited her taste, cared little for her husband's dislike to it.

- "I am going to answer my mother's letter, Charles," she said, when breakfast was over;— "what day shall I name for our arrival?"
- "What arrival?—what do you mean?" inquired my father, in a hasty tone, which he seldom used to her.
- "You have a very short memory. Don't you know that Sara is to be married on the fifteenth of this month?"

My father started and grew pale.

"I know it," he answered. "What then?"

"What then! When shall we go?"

- "Go!" he exclaimed;—"go, at such a moment! Are you thinking of it?"
- "You see that I am thinking of it, since I am speaking of it."
- "Ellen! Ellen! one would think that you did not know the grave reasons which keep me at Daniel Ville all the month of July."
- "I think they ought rather to induce you to go away. However, my dear, you must stay if you think well. One thing is certain: that I am expected at my sister's wedding, and that I will go."
- "What!" said my father, in an altered voice; "you would leave me? Do you seriously talk of leaving me?"
 - "Certainly; -what harm is there in it?"
- "What harm!" and his eyes kindled; "what harm in leaving me in the midst of difficulties which you have caused? It is for your sake that I have done what I ought not to have done, and that I have even become ——"

He looked at me and stopped speaking.

"Oh, I know," said my stepmother, bitterly; "I am the cause of everything unpleasant that happens to you. Is it not a reason for relieving you from my presence for a while, and for going where at least no one will upbraid me?"

"And where you will find comforters," added my father, in a hoarse voice. "Take care! what has happened once may happen again; and, present or absent, I will never let my name or my person become a subject of ridicule."

"But who is attacking your name and your person?" asked Mrs. Perceval, shrugging her shoulders. "Your suspicious nature always leads you to extremes. You made yourself ridiculous on one occasion by seeking a quarrel with a man who had the fault of being considered amiable, and whom all women were glad to see: let that satisfy you, and spare me further recriminations."

"This amiable man, however, had little regard for you, Mrs. Perceval, and even less for your husband."

"Can you wonder?—does not everyone see how tiresome, and jealous, and exacting you are?"

"I have not been so as yet; but since this is the state of things, I will for the future. You will answer your mother that important business prevents our leaving Daniel Ville. Do you hear me?"

"Certainly, with both ears. Pray, let that suffice; we have had enough for one day?"

Mrs. Perceval quitted the room, leaving me alone with my father. He remained quiet and thoughtful for some time; then, suddenly rising, said: "I am obliged to go to town, Gabrielle, and I cannot be back till to-morrow. I will ask you to do all you can, by kind consideration, to soften the disappointment which Ellen must feel. She was very anxious to go; but if she had left me now, especially to go to Paris, I do not know what anger and despair would have driven me to."

"Besides, it is her duty to stay with you," said I, decidedly. "You seem to have sorrows and anxieties;—to leave you alone would be an unworthy act."

"Oh! if she was like you, Gabrielle!—if she had your good heart and your good sense!"

"It is true that I am devotedly attached to my relations and friends. I am not unreasonable, you say, father; why, then, must I be ignorant of griefs which I would fain share?"

"You will know them but too soon," he answered, "and then you will see why, to you, my lips are sealed. Pity me, for I suffer at times so that my reason is affected. If I cannot this day avert the misery that is threatening, I don't know what will become of me—I shall go mad.

I hope to gain time: time alone, aided by the most resolute firmness, can help me out of the labyrinth in which for months I have been hopelessly [entangled. But I have said enough, perhaps too much. Farewell till to-morrow. Gabrielle; pray that the effort I am going to make may be successful, and don't leave your step-mother. Ought I to go without seeing her again? No; I will not leave an unhappy impression on her mind. There she is on her way to the garden. I will join her. Farewell!" And he left me to my regrets at the weakness of his heart and nature where others were concerned.

Mrs. Percival spent all the rest of the day in her room, and consequently I was unable to carry out my father's desire. I was not sorry: for every day increased my aversion and contempt for this vain and selfish woman, as she relentlessly tormented the devoted husband who, for her sake, had sacrificed the repose of his old age.

I remained in the drawing-room, that I might be found at my post if she should choose to come down; for although she most unceremoniously got rid of my company whenever she did not really need me, she objected to my retiring to my room, and made bitter complaints to my father that I systematically avoided her society.

About seven o'clock, I heard the doors of the coach-house open, and I saw the carriage brought out. I thought that Mrs. Perceval was going to take a drive, and was by no means surprised when she appeared in her bonnet and cloak.

"I have come to bid you good-bye, Gabrielle," she said, in a careless tone. "You will kindly take care of the house while I am away, and tell Charles of my departure. I am taking Augustine with me to Paris, for one can't do without a maid in the case of a wedding."

I should not have thought of interrupting her, even if she had gone on much longer, for I was dumb with surprise and indignation. She had come near me as if to kiss me. I shrank back. "You must be in jest, Mrs. Perceval, when you speak of going to Paris?" Isaid, with a forced smile.

"What further proof do you want, my dear? Don't you see they are putting my trunk on the carriage? Come; will you bid me good-bye, or will you not? The coach starts at eight, and Sara is to be married in three days."

I looked out and was convinced of the reality of her departure. I thought of my father's despair, and, commanding my indignation, I begged her not to carry out a project, the idea of which had so greatly distressed him. She listened with visible impatience; and, as I ended by saying, with feeling which brought tears to my eyes: "I beseech you, spare his tender heart; do not cause him such a great sorrow! Stay for his sake!" she burst into the mocking laughter too familiar to my ears.

I rose from my chair, pale with anger: "Laugh, madam, laugh as much as you please at a daughter's affection for her father, but do not break a heart which has, unfortunately, been but too devoted to you. There is a limit to forbearance. Beware! My father is weary of this state of things. He left home fully relying on the promise you made him. I tremble to think of the effect this strange departure will have on him."

"Ah! so you have done crying," she said, ironically;—"and your anger comes quickly after your pretence of grief. I made no promise, I would have you know. I did not bind myself in any way. To avoid farewell scenes, I start before he returns; that is all."

"Duty is nothing to you, then, madam? My father is sad, depressed, and ill: your proper place is at his side."

"You really take a very high tone in speaking to me, Miss Perceval," rejoined my step-mother,

scornfully. "For such a dutiful daughter, you have a very singular way of speaking. But as I cannot just at present profit by your wise counsels, spare yourself the trouble of offering them. Good-bye." She turned towards the door.

"Oh, it is impossible! You surely will not go, Mrs. Perceval;—you will not leave Daniel Ville!" I exclaimed, involuntarily.

"Do you intend to keep me prisoner? As well go now as later. Your turn will come."

"I am in my own home, madam," said I, fairly exasperated, "and no one can force me to quit a property which comes to me from my mother." She shrugged her shoulders, smiled maliciously, and went away.

I soon heard the carriage-wheels, and I was left alone, a prey to the most dismal forebodings.

Next morning I arose betimes to look out formy father's return. I was afraid that he might too suddenly hear of my step-mother's flight; and, having been unable to prevent it, I wished at least to soften the blow as much as possible.

About ten o'clock in the evening, I heard the gallop of a horse. My father rode fast only when he was agitated or anxious; and the sound made me fear that the business on which he had gone had come to no satisfactory conclusion. I hastened

to meet him, that I might prevent any indiscreet announcement on the part of the servants; but, just as I reached the yard, I heard the side door shut violently, and I saw Peter looking in that direction, and so stupefied that he had forgotten the horse, which was covered with foam and sweat, my father having rapidly dismounted and thrown him the bridle.

I went to Peter, and asked: "Where is my father?"—He pointed to the door.—"So it was he who came in just now?" said I, more alarmed than I cared to show. "He—he seemed annoyed;—what did you say to him?"

"Nothing, Miss. When my master came back, he looked very strange. He sprang off the horse, and asked me where my mistress was. I told him that she left home yesterday, and took the coach for Paris. I drove her to meet it; so he could not have asked anyone that knew better. He looked at me; and his eyes were like fire, and he ran to the door! It was not my fault, Miss; I had to answer him."

"Certainly; there was no harm in that: indeed there could be no harm. My father is not well, and he has come back very tired: no wonder if he seems strange."

I went back to the house, full of anxiety. The

room to which the side door led was the library, and my father often sat there. When he was there he was known to be engaged in business, and no one ventured to disturb him.

After waiting for some minutes, as he did not come to the drawing-room, I went to the library. No one now was there to come between us, and I was the less afraid of infringing the rule he had laid down, feeling sure that he would forgive me for the sake of my good intentions. With my words of comfort ready on my lips, I confidently took hold of the handle of the door; but I tried to open it in vain; it was locked inside. I knocked. I called, first gently, and then more loudly; no answer came.

The library had a door opening on the garden. I thought he must have gone out that way, and I went back to the drawing-room to wait for him. He never came. At last I went to bed in great distress, and at break of day I went, before I was dressed, to his room; the bed had not been touched, and he did not seem to have been there. My anxiety by this time was agonising. The library door, at which I had knocked the evening before was still fastened. I went to the passage at the other side; that door also was locked. What could my father

be doing? Why had he spent the night in the library?

These questions tortured my heart, and I could find no answer. As his silence continued, and caused me such terror and anxiety, I ultimately called for Peter, and, standing before one of the doors, bade him open it, or, if he could not open it, break it in. He tried for some time, and as his efforts were all fruitless, I went for tools, and tremblingly waited till the door was burst open.



XXI.

NSPEAKABLE was my consolation when I saw my father seated at his writing-table at the other end of the

room, busily engaged in examining bundles of papers which surrounded him. His attention was so completely absorbed by his work that apparently he had not heard the noise we had made. Motioning to Peter to leave the room, I went to where he was sitting, and gently asked: "Will you not soon have done with these dreadful papers? You have neither eaten nor slept since yesterday."

"No," he replied, still continuing to turn over a quantity of letters which lay open before him. "I am looking everywhere for the accounts of your minority, and, do what I will, I can't find them."

I proposed to help him; he nodded assent, and I took a number of papers away to a corner of the room, and there proceeded to examine them minutely. There were many letters among the other papers. Some words caught my eye, and arrested my attention, and, as I looked further, I became convinced that my father was a ruined man. Letters of recent date contained threats from wearied creditors, who declared that they would proceed to extreme measures, unless things were settled before the 15th; it was now the 14th. Such, then, was the mystery so carefully concealed from me, while it was the cause of my poor father's misery. Though the discovery distressed me, I did not despair, for, I thought to myself, I have fortune enough for us both, and I will not leave my father in a difficulty, if it is in my power to aid him. This very day he shall know that he may dispose of whatever I possess.

As I continued my investigations, another mystery was cleared up. My father's departure from Paris had been due to two causes: first, Mrs. Perceval's extravagance, which he could no longer endure; and, secondly, an affair of honour in which her indiscretion had involved him. One of the fashionable idlers, whose society pleased her, had spoken of her in a very disparaging manner, and my father had challenged him. When he returned to Brittany he was still suffer-

ing from a wound received in the duel which had ensued.

I had then before me written evidence of the selfishness of the woman for whom he had endangered his peace of mind, and his life itself; but I could not discover the required document.

Each time that I wanted fresh papers to examine, I went in silence to my father's table for them, and returned without saying a word, as he did not seem inclined for conversation. He turned over the papers in a nervous manner, and looked five or six times through the same bundle. After many hours of patient search, I arrived at the conclusion that the paper was certainly lost; and, coming to my father's side, I told him that, after looking at everything, I was sure it was not in the library. At this very moment, turning my eyes to his table, I saw the very document we had so long vainly sought lying open before him.

I looked at him in amazement, and, taking the paper in my hand, presented it to him.

"No, no; I shall never find it," he muttered between his teeth.

"But here it is!" I exclaimed.

"Yes; that one!—but the other?—the one that Gabrielle, my poor dear wife, brought me last night?"

I was speechless with fear; his hair was dishevelled, his countenance was pallid, and his lips were moving nervously.

"Look," he said, "look again! It must be found before she returns from Paris. Beautiful Paris! I used to live there; did I not? Look well.—Your poor mother! She rose from her grave to bring it, and I saw her hand write on it the words: 'Faithless guardian.' See! the letters are red—blood-red!"

I threw down the paper and held fast by the table that I might not fall. Alas! I had feared for his life, and I had never thought of the worst sorrow, of that which had come upon him, of madness! The gloomy prediction, which he had uttered two days ago, had come true!

I was so shocked, so stunned, that I could neither speak to him nor do what he bade me. Pale, and quivering with fear, I stood and looked at him. I felt as if I was choking.

"Will you look?" he called out, passionately, fixing his wild eyes on me.

"Yes, father," I said, gently, restraining my tears, "I will look."

"Your father!" he continued in his madness.
"I am nobody's father. Your father is a rascal, a heartless wretch, a good-for-nothing fellow,

who has wasted everything, even the property entrusted to him."

He gnashed his teeth, and from his eyes there darted a look of anxiety and restlessness, without a trace of intelligence.

I took up the first packet of letters that came to hand, and hastened back to my corner, that I might give free course to my tears. My father was searching; he searched on part of the night. The fearful truth that had burst upon me seemed to have suspended all power of exercising my faculties. I could not have taken a step, and I shuddered when I thought that if this calmness gave place to an outbreak of violence, I should be utterly unable to control it in any degree. But there was no need. He continued turning over the papers which lay before him.

He stopped his work from time to time, and then broke into wandering words. Two ideas perpetually recurred in his incoherent talk: the fatal letter which had been brought to him by my mother, and on which she had traced the words: "unfaithful guardian;" and the prediction of a gipsy in Paris, who had told him that he would be betrayed and ruined. I listened to it all with a breaking heart.

I had not moved from my place when the first dawn of day began to struggle with the waning light of the lamp. I thought his agitation was increasing. He passed his fingers through his hair, and began to stride to and fro, speaking to himself, and never heeding me, while in trembling anguish I watched each step he took.

As the clock struck seven the door opened, and Peter entered the room. He looked ill-atease, and, coming straight to me, said, in a low voice: "There is a person downstairs who wants to see my master." "I will go and speak to him," I said at once, and, looking towards my father, I added, "Stay here, Peter, if you please, and don't take your eyes off him."

It cost me much to be obliged in any way to allude for the first time to my father's sad state. Peter observed it, and answered: "Never fear, Miss Perceval, I understand it all; yesterday I saw that my master was not himself."

Completely reassured by the good man's words, I went downstairs. A man with whom I was quite unacquainted was in the drawing-room.

I did not at first understand the reason of his embarrassment at seeing me, or of the urgency with which he asked for my father. It was all in vain to tell him that my father was ill and unable to see anyone. He replied that his business admitted of no delay, and ended by presenting a stamped paper, which revealed the truth to me. It bore the terrible date, the 15th, which had affected my father so painfully; the man who stood before me was then the sheriff's officer. Such a complication of misfortunes was indeed calculated to cast me down; but God gives strength in proportion to our need, and none are entirely overwhelmed save those who rebel, instead of resigning themselves to His will.

I left the messenger of evil in the drawingroom and went upstairs, carrying with me the
ill-omened papers. I wanted to ascertain their
meaning, but I could not understand the peculiar language in which they were expressed.
Suddenly a good idea struck me. I felt that in
my loneliness I had not strength to meet all the
difficulties of my cruel position. From whom
could I seek support and aid? Aunt Desirée,
whose devotion to me was that of a parent, was,
I knew, little acquainted with business matters.
Mr. Felix du Bressy was the only one who
could, if he would, be of use to me, and though
I had never seen him since my engagement with

René had been broken off, I ventured to write to him, begging him to come at once to Daniel Ville.

I sent my letter by a special messenger, and anxiously awaited his reply.

He replied by coming to me himself. Leaving my father under Peter's care, I went down to receive him; we shook hands warmly, and looked at each other sorrowfully.

"I thank you, my dear child, for thinking of me in this trouble; I am completely at your service. Do what you will with me. So that worthless woman is gone!"

"Yes; and I am sure that her departure has a great deal to say to my father's deplorable state. If he had found her here, perhaps his reason would not have given away."

"His poor head had long been much affected, my dear Gabrielle; but perhaps it is only a passing attack. Tell me everything that has happened. I have come to do what I can for you, and I trust you will give me your entire confidence."

Encouraged by his kind words, I gave him a full description of the sad scenes of the past day and night.

When I had finished, he shook his head sadly,

saying: "You have told me nothing new, my dear child. Perceval was worn out by care and remorse. Do not look so surprised; as a man of honour he could not endure the thought of the injustice he had done you by wasting your fortune—a trust which he ought to have considered as sacred. Oh! how I pitied him the day he had to confess to me how his deplorable weakness for that wretched woman had led him astray."

"And what was the reason of his confession?" I asked, with some hesitation, fearing to learn anything that might impair the esteem which, despite of his failings, I still cherished for my father.

"What was the reason? You ask the reason. But, indeed, you can't know it. Have you forgotten the day when I came to this very room with my brother to ask you to become our adopted daughter?"

"I remember it all," I answered, sadly.

"Then you must remember your father's strange conduct in reference to that affair."

"Perfectly. I never could understand his agitation on learning the purpose of your visit; his opposition, and then his sudden consent, and afterwards his anger when he found that all was at an end."

"The explanation of the whole mystery is this: When the proposal was made your fortune had been swallowed up, and no one was aware of it. On your marriage, your mother's fortune, which she had unfortunately capitalised, came to you by right. Do you now understand all his shame, and misery, and excitement?"

"So that is what he tried in vain to tell me," I exclaimed. "Oh! would that I had known it."

"You would have sacrificed yourself, would you not? But he shrank from an act of such revolting selfishness. Only two courses were open: either to tell you the truth, which would implicitly have been to urge you to refuse the offer and to hide his dishonourable conduct, or to tell us, the representatives of René who, as your husband, would have had the right to ask him to account for your squandered fortune. I shall never forget his tone of despair, when, with burning shame on his countenance, he said to us: 'My friends, honour forbids me to proceed in this matter. I must confess to you that I am a miserable wretch, and my daughter, whom you believed to be in possession of her mother's handsome fortune, has nothing."

"And that did not make you give me up?"

said I, deeply touched; "you still asked for me, notwithstanding my poverty?"

"Certainly, my child; this disclosure could not change our intentions; but we were only ambassadors; and, therefore, while we promised perfect secrecy, we were obliged to say that René must be consulted. I must say that he did not hesitate for a moment, and generously reproached us for not having at once continued the arrangements for your marriage. His reply was communicated to your father: the rest of the story you know."

My uncle and I were both silent. This revelation, which proved to me the truth and the disinterestedness of the affection René had then borne me, affected me deeply.

"Now we must attend to business," said Mr. du Bressy. "Will you let me read those papers, which to you are a dead letter?"

"Pray, take them all," said I, handing them to him.

"Well, I will now have my horse put to, and will drive into town. On my way I will look into them, and I will then go and consult my lawyer as to what can be done."

"But my father"-

"Is not Peter looking after him?"

"Yes; I have charged him to remain there."

"Then you need not fear. I will bring back a doctor who will give us his opinion on his state. Perhaps the malady is of a temporary character: I say perhaps, for you must not build on an uncertain hope. And now, my child, be, as you have been, brave and patient: it is a bitter trial, I know, but you have been tried already, and you have not been wanting. I will take the sheriff's officer with me. If other similar messages are brought you, send them on to me: or, indeed, would it not be well if I established myself here for a few days?"

I clasped my hands in a transport of gratitude. "I did not venture to ask it of you, uncle; how can I repay your great goodness, which I feel all the more deeply considering what has passed."

He looked at me, and smiled sadly: "Did you really think then, my dear, that we were deceived by your generosity? No one who was not very blind or prejudiced could have failed to see your motive in refusing. Even before this marriage to Sara, which leaves no shadow of doubt, we never for a moment accused you of inconstancy. You have been basely deceived; but the offender will not escape the punishment

he so richly deserves. In fact it has already begun."

"What do you mean, uncle—René?"

"René, in the whirl of Paris life, is beginning his career by extravagance, which, if continued, will soon lead to his ruin. We have quite done with him. Don't say anything; he had his choice, and, whether you like it or not, he must abide by it. He is ungrateful;—let us say no more about him."

Mr. du Bressy went away, and I was left to my sad reflections. Wearied in contemplation of such a hopeless labyrinth of varied misfortune, I could only find repose by laying my heavy burden at the foot of the cross, and in fervent prayer repeating those words which fell from divine lips in the hour of agony, and which contain the whole of Christian resignation: "Thy will be done, my God."

Six months later I left Daniel Ville, never again to return. Accompanied by Uncle Felix I took my father to Caen. The doctor, without giving us any hope, had decided that it was necessary to place him in an asylum, and had recommended one in that town.

It was a melancholy journey, and all that I had gone through had so impaired my health

that my uncle insisted on my leaving Caen the same day. Weeping, I took a last leave of my father, who did not understand it, and then I mechanically followed my uncle's directions. This sorrowful separation so prostrated me that I spent several hours in the railway carriage without noticing anything that was happening.

At last the voice of an official, proclaiming in his monotonous accent the name of a station where we halted, aroused me, and I looked at my uncle, wondering where we were. He leant towards me, and said: "You must not mind my having changed our route; I think it is a good plan to go to Paris before you return to Rosevale."

Deeply touched by this fresh mark of affection I feigned a satisfaction which, in my present spirits, I could not really feel. But his idea was a very wise one: a few days in Paris were likely to have a good effect on my mind. Paris is the place for distraction; the attention is necessarily excited, and amusement surrounds one at every step.

My uncle gave me not a moment's peace. We left our hotel each morning, and only returned in the evening. The Thursday after our arrival

he took a carriage and we drove to the park. The weather was so fine that I wished to walk a little. We got out of the carriage; my uncle desired the coachman to wait for us, and we strolled on, stopping from time to time to watch the brilliant crowd which filled a wide avenue. We reached an enclosure where some deer, graceful captives from the forest, were disporting themselves on the green turf. My uncle, who had no sympathy with the trimmed and cultivated phase of nature, was delighted with the sight of these charming animals, and, leaning over the railing, he endeavoured to attract a doe, which stood looking at him with her calm gentle eye.

Just at this moment a carriage, which was slowly coming towards us, attracted my attention. It was open, and was drawn by two magnificent horses.

Against the blue damask lining two faces stood out; one was old, wrinkled, and long, and was quite unknown to me, the other was young, rosy, and beautiful, surrounded by masses of fair curls.

My heart beat violently: "how like Sara!" thought I to myself. The elegance of the equipage, the livery and the old lady's face pre-

vented my exclaiming, with absolute certainty, "It is Sara."

Another lady and gentleman occupied the front seat of the carriage. I could only see the top of the gentleman's hat, and a long feather, which was placed in an eccentric manner in the lady's black lace bonnet. I was glad to wait and see this carriage pass, and we remained stationary for some moments, my uncle still making friendly advances to the doe, which reminded him of his woods, and I gazing on the blue carriage. It advanced, and now the figures on the front seat came full in view. I hurriedly drew down my veil, for I saw Mrs. Perceval and René. I glanced at my uncle, but occupied with his four-footed friend he had not observed the passers-by.

"Oh! my flowers," exclaimed Sara's voice, quite close to us.

Her nosegay of Parma violets had slipped from her hand and lay almost at my feet. René bid the coachman stop, got down, and came close to where I was standing. I feared that he would recognise me, and I feared that my uncle would turn round, but nothing of the kind occurred; René went quietly back to the carriage, which moved on, only to stop again a few paces further

off. This time, however, it was on account of some well-mounted horsemen who had greeted the ladies.

The image of René must have been deeply imprinted on my memory or I should have hesitated to recognise my ancient lover in this man of fashion, with his pale complexion and exquisite dress. The metamorphosis was the third which I had seen him undergo. The change which my secret influence had formerly effected was moral rather than physical. Though René had then become more careful as to his appearance, he had retained not only the ordinary attire but the active gait and the sun-burnt complexion of a genuine country gentleman. Now his hair and his beard were artistically arranged; his eyes were hollow from late hours; his whole frame seemed enervated. Sara was unchanged, pretty, and laughing as before. Mrs. Perceval, richly dressed, seemed full of animation, and I thought with sadness of the past when I looked at her. What would she have said had she recognised, in the unnoticed woman near whom she passed in her triumph and splendour, the daughter of the man whom she had so shamefully forsaken? And yet, such is the consoling power of duty fulfilled, that I would not have changed places with her. I would not have given my tears, and the sorrow which had rent my heart when I left my father in the lunatic asylum, probably his last home, for all her pleasures and entertainments. Strong in the testimony of my own conscience I pitied her, and in the bottom of my heart despised rather than hated her.

This meeting saddened me, and my uncle had almost to compel me to go with him to the theatre that evening. He had heard much of the pieces mentioned in the programme, and had ascertained that there would be nothing of a nature repugnant to my feelings. It was my first visit to a theatre, and, almost spite of myself, I became interested. During a whole hour I forgot everything, so completely was I engrossed by the charm of the lovely music. Two pieces were announced in the programme, and while we waited for the curtain to rise I looked round with my opera-glass. I saw in a box opposite to me René, Mrs. Perceval, Sara, and two other persons. Towards this box many opera-glasses were directed, for it contained three pretty women in dazzling attire. Sara's sky-blue dress was most becoming; her head, with its wealth of beautiful hair, shone forth

against the dark velvet hangings, she was talking with her wonted gaiety to her next neighbour. Mrs. Perceval had, as usual, placed herself in an attitude: her fine arms were crossed carelessly, she held her head high, and her great black eyes glanced scornfully around her. I drew back that she might not see me; but, indeed. I attracted so little attention that it would have been a mere chance if she had observed me. My uncle looked in the direction of the box occupied by Mrs. Perceval and her party, but the distance prevented any recognition on his part. René had a wearied air: I saw him more than once stifle a yawn, and the expression of his countenance was very grave. He paid little attention to the play, and continued indifferent all through the first part. By a strange chance the plot of the piece acted had in it much that was like our story. A young girl was the victim, in this case, of ambition, and many of the scenes might have been borrowed from our life. At the moment where the false lover sacrificed the girl who had pledged her troth to him, I looked at Mrs. Perceval's box; René then seemed deeply interested, I was struck by the pained curiosity with which he was listening. Sara turned and spoke to him

with a smile, but he answered impatiently, continued gloomy, and gave no further heed to her. Perhaps his thoughts wandered back to former days; perhaps in his inmost heart he regretted having given up one whose tastes were in harmony with his own. His wan features and wearied air showed me but too plainly that his present round of excitement was doing violence to his nature. He regretted the free country life which he had hitherto enjoyed; and it was hard for him to bear the capricious and tyrannical yoke of a woman like Sara who knew no law but her own pleasure.

The sight of all these well-known faces renewed my sadness, and I was much relieved when the curtain fell.

The next day but one I left Paris, bearing with me, to augment my sufferings, the conviction that René was not happy.



XXII.



SPENT two years at Rosevale—years which left the mark of no great event graven on my memory. Time passes

wondrously quickly in the monotony and calmness of country life. To-day we do much the same as we did yesterday, and to-morrow we shall do much the same as we did to-day.

After all that I had gone through in the long period of anxiety which began when I left St. Mary's Convent, nothing could have been more congenial than my sojourn at Rosevale. People feel things in different ways. There are some who cannot live with their disappointments, and whom memory kills. They need fresh excitements and new distractions; they require to be violently rescued from the moral surroundings in which they live, and to have their past absorbed by the present. I only longed for rest. Temporal things had grown distasteful to me, for all the sweet illusions which give their charm to

youth had vanished one by one. Life appeared in an austere aspect, no longer as an end, but as a means, and I clearly saw that those who would reap with joy must, alas! sow in tears.

During these two years I looked on myself as an old maid, and steadfastly eschewed all amusements. My aunt's state of health furnished me with a sufficient reason for remaining at home. I seldom had any visitors, and my acquaintances soon gave me up. But a danger lurked under this apparent tranquillity. Having resolved not to marry, and to spend whatever length of life God would still grant me at Rosevale, I had given up all worldly joys and pleasures. But was I right in thus narrowing my existence? Was I not in danger of selfishness, the common failing of women whose devotion is not called forth by the claims of family life? My conscience was alarmed: I meditated on the doom of the barren tree; I dreaded uselessness. I looked around me; I saw miseries that needed to be consoled, and I made an important resolution. Aunt Desirée had long been the Providence of the poor parish in which we lived; there was at Rosevale a miniature dispensary, where the poor used to seek the medicines they needed, but for some time it had not been in

working order, and I determined to take possession of this institution. The doctor lived nine miles off, and our two Sisters of Charity had three parishes to visit. I became their assistant, and found in doing good a source of unfailing joy. A charitable object gave interest to my walks and made my leisure useful. If only I had had within reach some friend with whom I could have enjoyed the sweet intercourse which is one of life's charms, especially for those whose part is rather a passive one, I could have asked for nothing more.

Aunt Desirée and my good old uncles did not completely satisfy all the needs of my heart and mind. There are things which can only be expressed to those who, we feel, fully understand us, and from this point of view my isolation was, perhaps, too complete. I had not reached that height of perfection at which God suffices for the soul, so that it feels not any want of human affections and consolations.

Eight months after he had entered the asylum at Caen my father was carried off by a malignant fever of short duration. I had not time to go to him, but the account given me of his last hours was encouraging. A few moments before his death there was a kind of lucid interval, and

advantage was taken of this to administer the last Sacraments of the Church. I had constantly prayed that he might be able to receive them, and God in His mercy heard my prayer. He showed great devotion in his preparation for death, and he asked for me. The Sisters in attendance wrote at once, but before the letter was despatched he had passed away, and they added a postscript to tell me the tidings.

"Just two years to-day since you came from Paris, Gabrielle," said Aunt Desirée, who had a great love for anniversaries, and who had many associations connected with the event in question.

"Two years, to the day," said Renotte, who was coming into the room, and had heard my aunt's words.

"The postman wants threepence Miss," she continued; "there is no stamp on this letter," and she handed me a letter from Paris. While Aunt Desirée was paying the postage I opened the letter, which was addressed in an unknown handwriting. I started when I caught the signature "Sara," at the end. This was the letter:—

"MY DEAR GABRIELLE.

"You are good, and I have neglected you—at least I have seemed to do so; but I am

so unhappy that I do not hesitate to write to you. You cannot think what trouble we have had for some time. It must be owned, it is our own fault. We have been very foolish; luxury costs a great deal, and Paris is full of so many temptations! René had long been urging me to be more reasonable in my ideas, and to set things in order; but I used to grow sulky when he came to trouble me in my ease; and I may tell you, Gabrielle, that Ellen influenced me to do so, and that her advice made me shrink from giving up anything. You know she has married an ugly, grumbling old Englishman, who has carried her off to the depths of Devonshire, notwithstanding his solemn promise to live in Paris. After her departure René got really angry, and said hard things to me; and if I were jealous, and were not very fond of you, his reproaches would have made me furious: for he said in a moment of irritation that he should always regret his folly in sacrificing his happiness for my sake. That made me cry, and I made up my mind to be good and prudent; but, in the midst of all my good resolutions, a friend of René's, for whom he had gone security, made off, I know not where, leaving us answerable for his debts. We were already very short of money, and René was trying to find employment. He was completely knocked down by this blow. He wrote to his uncles; for he was in danger of being put in prison. They have not even answered; and, in order to escape being taken up, he has fled to Belgium. I could not go with him, for my mother was ill, and my own condition, also, was against it. Poor mamma died a week ago, and horrible men came to seize everything. Here I am alone in Paris, with a small sum of money. What is to become of me?—and, above all, what is to become of my little one? I would work for it: nothing would be too hard; but I don't know how to do any single thing. Ellen, who now also, gives me up, advises me to go to my husband's uncles. Dear Gabrielle, tell them how miserable I am; perhaps they will take pity on me, and let me live with them. This loneliness is more than I can bear; I must be near you again. If I were to die, what would become of my child? Good God! my heart is breaking at the thought. Write to me, Gabrielle; don't delay, for I feel my poor head is growing confused. I have no hope but in your friendship. Oh! Gabrielle, I never laugh now; for two months I have been in sorrow-sorrow that is killing me."

"Come from the window, and shut it, Gabrielle," said Aunt Desirée, just as I finished reading this letter; "the rain is beating in; I see great drops on your face."

I dried away the tears which had risen from my heart and moistened the paper on which Sara's touching story was written, and still remained for some moments buried in thought. I was deeply shocked at the terrible position of one whom I could not but love. Sara was in sorrow. Oh! how she must be suffering! I would fain have bid her come at once, but it was impossible.

"This letter seems to trouble you, my child?" asked Aunt Desirée, for the second time, being curious to know something of its contents.

"It makes me sad, aunt."

"From whom is it?"

"From Sara du Bressy."

Aunt Desirée's false curls were shaking.

"Do you write to that Englishwoman?" she said, in a tone of vexation.

"No, aunt, and this is the first letter I have had from her since her marriage. Shall I read it to you?"

Aunt Desirée nodded a doubtful kind of assent, and I read it to her.

A certain twinkling of the eyelids led me to

guess that she was not an unmoved listener; but she was so displeased with all my stepmother's family that she denied herself the satisfaction of showing her feelings.

"What will you do?" she asked.

"I will try," was my answer.

"You will do no good. Iknow the Du Bressys: they can never forget René's ingratitude."

I was rather inclined to agree with her, nevertheless, I set off to Greenwood without delay. My uncles had colds, and were smoking at the chimney-corner. After some preliminary observations I spoke of Sara, and read her letter with all the feeling I could. It was quite useless: they were not impressed either by the letter or by my emotion. René had only got what he deserved, they said, and when I earnestly pleaded Sara's cause, they coldly answered: "This young woman's position is sad, but she can never be anything more than a stranger to us, since she has taken our name without our consent."

These old men had been most compassionate and sympathising with regard to my troubles, but on the present occasion they were hard and inexorable, and I returned to Rosevale in despair at having gained nothing. I wished, at least, to interest Aunt Desirée, but all I could gain from her was the permission to use the allowance which she gave me for Sara's benefit. I wrote to Sara, telling her the result of my efforts, and assuring her tenderly of my sympathy in her sorrows. I sent a small sum of money with my letter, for her great misery went to my heart.

She never acknowledged my letter, and for two months I looked in vain for tidings from her. I was anxious. All alone, with her ignorance of life and of everything—her helplessness, her trustfulness, what would become of her in that great Paris? I made up my mind to write to the master of the hotel in which she had taken refuge, and after a few days, as I passed through the village, I found his reply waiting for me at the Post-office. Mrs. du Bressy had left Paris more than a month before. This letter was a great blow to me. I was reading it over again mechanically, when I heard a voice pronounce my name. I looked round, but no one was to be seen.

"Gabrielle! Gabrielle!" repeated the voice.

I looked up. The Post-office and the principal inn of the place formed but one house; a window was open, a woman in mourning was leaning out, and her two little white hands were stretched towards me; the face was so pale, that I knew her to be Sara, more by a sort of intuition than by resemblance to her former self. I went in, ascended the stairs, and in a moment was at her side. She threw herself into my arms with her own carressing gracefulness. "Oh, Gabrielle!" she said, "if I did not go to meet you the moment I saw you, it is because I have not the strength." And, indeed, she seemed so weak that I had to lead her to a seat. I held her hand in mine, and looked at her in sad wonder. Could this shadow. this spectre, really be the Sara whom I had known so full of life and brightness? Her black dress hung round her fragile form; her cheeks were pale and bloodless, and her eyes seemed to have grown too large. While she spoke of her troubles they filled with tears, but a smile soon played on the faded crimson of her lips. Her expression rather surprised me; for, except when she spoke of her mother or of René, it did not betray the great grief of which she spoke. As she proceeded to thank me for my gift, I interrupted her by saying how glad I was to see her bear her bitter trials with so much moral courage.

"Courage!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Gabrielle, what a mistake you are making! I have been

in the depths of despair; but that bad time is past. For now I see you, and you are kind and loving: and then God has sent me such a consolation;—such a joy!" She laid her finger on my lips, and leaning on my arm, drew me to the other end of the room, opened the closed curtains of the bed, and, while her countenance beamed with deep and infinite joy, said in a tremulous voice, which still echoes in my heart: "My child!" A baby's head was on the pillow, a little sleeping cherub's face: two arms and two little hands—such little hands—lay on the bed-clothes. I kissed them both.

"Oh! you love my little Sara, don't you?" said the young mother.

"How could one help loving such a little angel? But come, Sara, and tell me all the rest of your story. I feel you must have had strange adventures." She took up the tale from the time when she had received my letter, which gave her no hope.

In fear and anxiety she had made up her mind at any hazard to start for Brittany, preferring, as she said, even a room in some village-inn near me to any resting-place at a distance. At Mans she had been obliged to stop, and there, in the inn, her baby was born. This event, which would have driven many another to despair, raised her from her depression. Instead of looking on the infant as a burden, she considered it a treasure. She longed to write and tell me the good news of its birth; but, fearing that I might dissuade her from carrying out her plans, she waited, and, as soon as it was possible, resumed her journey.

"And now that we have come," she said, in conclusion, looking at me imploringly with her beautiful eyes, "you won't send us away; will you, Gabrielle?"

"Send you away, Sara!" said I. "No one has the right to do that; but I do wonder what will become of you, for René's uncles won't hear of reconciliation."

"Who knows?" she answered. "Do you think anyone could refuse a little child?"

"What do you mean?"

"When my little daughter can speak, I will teach her a sweet little speech, and you shall take her to Greenwood; you will see that, for her sake, we shall be forgiven."

I could not find it in my heart to destroy this illusion, and I asked her plainly what were her resources.

The proceeds of the sale of jewels, horses, and

furniture, had been divided between her and René, and she had four hundred pounds, together with a little annuity paid to her by an English relation. Her idea was to live in the village till René should be free to join her.

Here our conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Renotte, and Sara seemed exhausted. When old Renotte appeared, I at once wished to gain her to Sara's side, and indeed, this was done without difficulty. I led her to the bed; the baby awoke, and fixed its limpid eyes on us.

"What a beautiful baby!" exclaimed Renotte: "quite a little picture!"

"Kiss it," said Sara, graciously. "It is stretching out its hands to you."

Renotte slipped her thin hands under the infant, and respectfully brought its little face close to hers. I whispered its name in her ear, to her great astonishment.

"Never!" said she.

"It is true, Renotte."

"Well, now I believe it, for she is as like her father as ever she can be; I saw him when he was that size." (The child was no more like René than like me; as far as could yet be seen she took after her mother.)

With Sara's consent Renotte fondled her for

some time, and, when we had left the room, observed: "It is odd that my mistress has taken such a dislike to Mr. René's wife. Such a taking little lady!"

Now, it is a well-known fact that Renotte's own feelings against René and his wife had been quite as strong as Aunt Desirée's. The sight of little Sara had worked this great change of sentiment which I rejoiced to observe; for the young mother's scheme recurred to my mind, and I hoped that the same softening influence would be effectual in other cases.

For some days after Sara's arrival at B—— I was much occupied with her and her child. With characteristic thoughtlessness she had bought some beautiful baby-linen, but had forgotten many of the necessary things. Little Sara was a delicate infant—so delicate, that Aunt Desirée insisted on giving her another nurse, to the great grief of her mother, who was bent on nursing her child herself. The reader will perceive that Aunt Desirée's resentment had vanished before Sara's sweet words and the baby's smiles. She called the mother a little goose, but she was glad to see her, and sent Renotte many messages to B——. Sara regained strength very slowly, and, for even the

short walk to Rosevale, needed the support of an arm. I grieved at seeing her compelled to live in the dismal inn, and, a week after her arrival there, Aunt Desirée and I prepared a new abode for her.

At the farm of Rosevale there was still standing a portion of the old dwelling-house: the upper story of this building was used as a loft, and the lower as a sort of lumber-room. lower story was divided into two rooms by a partition. We got the walls white-washed, had the boards and woodwork scrubbed, and brought the necessary furniture from Rosevale. the arched door, at whose sides the ivy spread its shining foliage, we placed a rustic seat, and one fine morning I found some pretext for leading Sara to this spot. The two rooms looked to the east, and were flooded with sunshine; there were flowers on every side, and from the door we looked over a large meadow, which sloped down to a silver brook.

"What a pretty cottage!" exclaimed Sara; "how white and fresh it looks," she added with a sigh, as she thought of the bare, ugly, sad, and smoky room at the inn.

I said nothing, wishing Aunt Desirée to have the pleasure of telling her the good tidings.

We entered the cottage. A little girl of fourteen, transformed into a servant-maid, did the honours. The kitchen was small; but, to make up for this, the other room was very large: it contained a bed and a cradle.

"How sorry I am that a stranger is coming to live so near you!" said Sara, as we turned away. "How I should have liked to live here during René's absence! And that fine large room would have been just the place for my little Sara."

I was delighted with Sara's sentiments, and when at last Aunt Desirée let out the secret which she had kept with such difficulty, the young mother was almost crazy with joy. "Come, you little goose, be quiet!" said my good aunt, "and read the newspaper for me while Gabrielle sees about moving your things and the baby's." One great advantage in this arrangement was, that it brought Sara quite close to the cottage where her baby was being nursed by our farmer's wife. Only a farmyard lay between the two, so that she could spend as much time as she liked with the little one, who was soon to live with her entirely in her new abode.

At the farm and in the village she was called Mrs. Sara, but her surname was a mystery, and at Greenwood nothing was known. I was anxiously expecting the visit of one of my uncles. At length Uncle Felix arrived, complaining much of rheumatism; he had not seen me for a fortnight, and wanted to know the reason of my absence. Aunt Desirée and I had laid our plans; so she said that I had been very much occupied on account of the unexpected arrival of a friend.

"Dear me! So it is true. Some days ago I heard you had let the cottage, but I did not believe a word of it. What could make you think of bringing anyone to live so near you, Desirée? You will find it very awkward, and will never feel really at home."

Aunt Desirée replied that she had made the sacrifice after due reflection, that the young woman at the cottage was very much to be pitied, and very interesting; and that it would have been cruel not to help her. I added some further details, as to her unavoidable separation from her husband, her bad health, and loss of fortune, but I avoided anything that could betray Sara.

Just as I had finished speaking, Renotte, who had been sent to the cottage, appeared with little Sara in her arms. I took the baby, and showed her to my uncle, who thought her very pretty, and kissed her with a good grace.

"Felix, that kiss binds you!" exclaimed Aunt Desirée.

"Binds me to what?" he asked, with surprise

"To love and protect this child," I said with emotion. "Dear uncle, forgive me if I have hidden its name from you, it is the same as yours."

He rose from his chair in agitation, and was about to leave the room. I stood before the door. and held up little Sara to bar the way; she looked at him with her angel-eyes, and began to laugh, her rosy cheeks showing their pretty dimples. But he had stretched out his arm, and put us to one side, when Sara herself appeared. I had not counted in vain on the effect of her presence; for when he saw the youthful form clothed in its mourning robes, his expression softened, and he stood still before her. It was an anxious moment, an opportunity not to be lost. I took Sara's hand, and boldly said: "Mr. Felix du Bressy." Sara bowed her head and joined her hands, as if in supplication. du Bressy," she said, in a tone whose vibrations touched one's very heart, "be angry with me if you will, you have every right; but do not let your displeasure fall on my child-on René's child!"

She took her baby, and brought it close to him: "A kiss for this little angel," she whispered. He obeyed. "And one for her mother," she added, putting the arm that was free round his neck.

She was quite irresistible. My uncle looked for a moment on the lovely woman and the cherub child, and his lips touched Sara's forehead;—that was a kiss of reconciliation—and we persuaded him to sit down again, and hear the story of her sorrows.

"Is not she charming, uncle?" said I, as I accompanied him to the door when his visit was over.

"I don't deny it;—but she is not the wife we chose for him,"

"Let us not say anything more about that," I answered, warmly; "and promise me that you will get Uncle Francis to forgive Sara and René."

"I will try." And with this promise, which he was certain to fulfil, he went away.



XXIII.

INCERELY as my uncles forgave Sara, they would not have known what to do with a woman and infant at Green-

wood, and therefore never thought of asking her to live with them, but they wished to contribute to her well-being. The upper part of the cottage was restored and furnished at their expense, so that her abode was now complete. Words had even been said which made me hope they would do something to help René out of his difficulties, but I approached this subject with the greatest delicacy, as rather a large sum of money would have been needed. Moreover, they thought it best not to hurry, but to let his banishment last for a while, in order to give him a lesson which might effectually prevent any future failing.

Every day they grew fonder of Sara and of the baby, which, as the latest scion of their race, represented the future to them.

We spent a pleasant summer, and with all the hopes that filled our hearts, we might have been quite contented if only Sara's health had improved. She was not in pain, but she was weak and pale. The doctors whom we consulted gave an encouraging opinion: they considered the nervous system to be affected; sleeplessness, weakness, and languor, were all attributed to this cause. Sara's spirits were not at all bad, and she was not in the least uneasy about herself. "I don't sleep," she would say; "but, then, I watch my baby sleeping; and, though I am awake, I dream such beautiful dreams for her." We saw no great change; we had got accustomed to her pale face and to the slight figure which seemed hardly able to bear its own weight.

Early in autumn I spent a week with a friend of Aunt Desirée's, who had very often invited me. Spite of all that was done to amuse and please me, this week seemed a very long one, and I was glad to return home. I found Sara in the avenue; she had set off to meet me, but her strength had failed, and she was sitting under a tree. The moment I sawher, her real state suddenly flashed upon me, and I needed all my self-control to enable me to command myself and

calmly ask her how she was. After embracing me, she answered, smiling, that she was much the same, perhaps a little weaker, and then drew my attention to the change in her dress.

"Black is melancholy," she said;—"it makes one think of death." She had put on a lilac dress with a white collar, which, however, seemed scarcely so white as the neck it encircled. Little Sara was growing apace, and within her pretty lips shone two teeth, like pearls set in rosy coral.

That evening I had a serious conversation with Aunt Desirée. I thought that our doctor must be mistaken, and I wished to have another. Aunt Desirée had too much experience to share our invalid's sanguine anticipations, and she owned that for some time she had been feeling anxious. With her consent, I sent a messenger the next day to the neighbouring town, with a note to an old doctor who had long attended our family, and now, on account of his great age, had retired from practice, except in very urgent cases.

When, some hours later, I told Sara what I had done, she did not appear in the least alarmed. "Let him come," she said; "only he must not tell me to stay in bed."

"You will do whatever he says, silly child!" said Aunt Desirée.

"Yes," I added, gravely, "we must try to get rid of this delicacy, which has gone on too long."

A carriage stopped at the door, and I went to meet the visitor. I thanked him for coming so soon, and anxiously awaited his verdict. He was in a hurry, and did not remain more than a quarter of an hour with his patient.

"Well, doctor, what is your opinion?" I asked, when he returned to the ante-room where I was waiting.

"You want to know the truth?" he said, somewhat roughly.

"Yes, the whole truth," I answered, with trembling.

"Well, I am sorry to say it, the poor little woman is dying."

"Oh, no! you must be mistaken," I cried, struck to the very heart.

"Unfortunately, there is no mistake; disease of the lungs is far advanced."

"But is there no remedy, doctor?"

"None."

"Good God! good God!" said I, joining my

hands in despair, "we are to blame; perhaps more ought to have been done."

"No; nothing more. Your doctor is an ignoramus, but no one could have prolonged life for an hour, and another might have made her suffer needlessly. The chest is in a fearful state. There is no cure, I tell you. Do not oppose her wishes in any way, if you can help it, and do not trust to appearances. She will die of weakness; the lamp is going out for want of oil."

He left me, and I seemed turned to stone, or crushed beneath this irrevocable sentence.

Soon I heard Sara call me. I dried my tears, and, mastering my emotion, returned to the drawing-room.

"What a nice doctor!" said Sara, gaily;—
"he ordered no medicine, and he told me not to
eat, since I have no appetite. He is a good
man."

A violent fit of coughing came on, and I saw that her handkerchief was stained with blood.

Aunt Desirée continued knitting furiously, and interrupted her work from time to time to dry her eyes furtively under her spectacles; she had understood the terrible import of her old friend's neutrality.

When I went to bear the sad news to Green-

wood, I could judge of the place that Sara held in the hearts that had formerly been so hostile. Tears fell on each white moustache, and deep, silent grief was marked on each manly countenance. My uncles were terrified at seeing speedy death threaten the graceful being whom they looked on as a daughter. For some days after the doctor's visit we vied with one another in trying to put away the sad impression made by his words. No one is infallible, we said: many people are living who have been given up by the doctors. No alarming change took place in Sara, though the trees were yellow with the autumn tints. All at once the temperature, which had hitherto continued warm, changed. Sara grew visibly worse, and hope forsook us. Her nights were bad, her cheeks glowed with hectic fever, and she could hardly rise. There came a day when she was obliged to keep her bed, and she complained much. I left her for a moment to give Aunt Desirée a report of her state. When I came back I found her sitting up in her bed; her cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright. The farmer's wife, with little Sara in her arms, was standing before her, and looked stupefied.

"Send this woman away, Gabrielle," she said,

on seeing me come back; "she tells me I am in consumption." And she burst into tears.

The woman came to me. "Miss Gabrielle, don't think I have vexed her on purpose. She was asking me what I did for my daughter who died, who was consumptive like Mrs. du Bressy, poor thing! and I said that nothing could be done for consumption. Is not that true?"

I saw that it was no fault of hers, but that Sara's indiscreet question had elicited one of those undisguised truths which the countrypeople say to each other as simply as possible.

I took the baby and said to Marion: "Go now, and be sure Mrs. du Bressy won't think the worse of you; but don't talk to her again about your daughter."

She went away much out of countenance, and I seated myself beside the bed where Sara lay motionless, her face covered with her hands. I put the little one on the bed, and pointed to her mother; she understood me, and gaily called, "Mamma! mamma!"

Sara was deaf to her voice. Then the baby leant down and put her little fair head on her breast, and with her tiny hands tried to move her mother's white fingers.

"Sara!" I exclaimed at last, beseechingly.

She moved and sat up, and then, fixing on me her large eyes, where fever was burning, she said, in a tone which cannot be described: "I will not die."

"But, Sara," I stammered out, "you must not—must not think——"

"I will not die! I will not die!" she repeated, with increasing energy. "Die at twenty!—do you think so? It would be dreadful to leave René, to leave my child! O God! O God!"

And she turned and rolled her lovely young head despairingly on the pillow. Her long hair had come down and covered her, and her sobs were breaking under the moving golden veil. It was heart-breaking to see her.

I tried to embrace her, but she put me away, and I could only wait in tears till the fit of despair had worn itself out. I put little Sara to bed, and prepared a soothing draught, which I was authorised to give her poor mother when necessary. She would not take it at first.

"But, Sara, you must take care of yourself, if you want to get well."

She took the glass with a trembling hand, swallowed the potion, and resting her head on her hand, closed her eyes. I heard a few sobs; then all was silence. She had fallen asleep.

On the following morning I came betimes to the cottage, with a heart full of grief, and in some anxiety as to my next meeting with Sara. Little Annette, who had been with her all night, said that she had been quiet until twelve, and then had asked for her baby and laid it beside her. When I came in I saw it still sleeping. I came near her; she turned her wearied face to me with an expression of melancholy which deeply grieved me. Then she put her arms round my neck, saying: "Dear Gabrielle, forgive me for my conduct yesterday."

She was oppressed, her voice was hoarse, and her eyes were full of tears. Poor Sara! the radiant smile which had gladdened the hearts of all who looked at her was gone. For some days she clung to life and hope, and it was very sad to see how this young and beautiful creature, who was just entering on life, struggled with death. Her tender love for her child was almost phrensy, and the bitter, silent tears she shed as she looked at her fell like melted lead on my heart.

With some difficulty I induced her to receive the last Sacraments, and I thought that the solemn rites seemed to give her an unwonted peace. The weather had grown mild, and she was able to be up for some hours in the middle of the day, which cheered her. We had cushions placed on the rustic seat, and I led her to it. She enjoyed the pure fresh air; she listened to all the country sounds, and watched her child playing at her feet. My uncles came daily to see her; they had sent for René, but Sara used to say, with a sigh, "He will come too late."

One day—it was a Saturday—the sun rose bright, and Sara, notwithstanding her great weakness, begged to go out. She asked for paper, pen, and ink, wrote a few lines with difficulty, then made me seal her letter and address it to "Mr. René du Bressy." Just as this was done, little Sara came to her, singing. She pressed the child to her heart, and said to me: "These lines, the last I shall ever write, give me confidence as to what will become of my angelchild. Gabrielle, promise to send this sealed letter to René one year after my death, not sooner." To satisfy her I promised; and then Aunt Desirée. wheeled in her chair by Renotte, joined us, together with my uncles. An hour passed by in quiet talk. Sara spoke from time to time in a

whisper, which did not tire her; her breathing was weak and intermittent. Generally I had plaited her hair to keep it out of her way, but that morning, at her own desire, it had been curled, and she had looked at herself in the mirror, and passing her ivory hand over her temple, had said, with a shudder: "When I am dead, Gabrielle, cut off a curl and send it to René."

From time to time she asked us what o'clock it was, or begged us to pray with her and for her. My uncles then uncovered their hoary heads, and we kept back our tears and said a prayer, while Sara raised her eyes to heaven, and an expression of unspeakable peace settled on her features. Then she would close her eyes again and turn her head on the pillow.

By-and-by Aunt Desirée said that she ought to be taken back to her bed. She heard the words, and opening her eyes looked sadly around her; then said: "If René were with me, I should like to die here, looking up to the sky."

The sound of hasty footsteps made us look up. A man came quickly, and fell on his knees at her side. It was her husband.

I will not recount the sorrowful scenes that ensued. He came just in time to receive her last farewell, to treasure up her last thoughts, and hear her latest sigh. In the night she passed gently away, without an agony, almost without pain.



XXIV.

CANNOT trust myself to go back to the months which followed after Sara had gone to a better world. They are

wrapped in a mourning veil, and the sadness which filled our souls when we gazed on the deserted cottage cannot be told. I did not see René again after the day when, with bent form and pallid brow, he followed to her last resting-place her who was to have been the companion of his life, but who had died at twenty.

Little Sara and a nurse whom Aunt Desirée had chosen for her lived at Greenwood.

The sight of the child, who was the living image of her mother, was at once a consolation and a grief to René. One day I heard that he had started for a northern town. A position long sought for connected with the railway had at last been given him. His uncles had not dissuaded him from taking it; in his present state

work was better for him than inaction. Sara stayed behind, and I was very glad of this. I had so often heard of her mother's touching regrets as to the position in which her death would leave the child, that, somewhat imprudently perhaps, I had promised to look after her. Truly it was my delight to watch over her—her welfare and her growth were matters of the greatest interest to me. She was the adopted child of Rosevale as well as of Greenwood, and certainly she loved nothing in the world better than "Mamma Gabrielle," as she called me in her sweet childish speech.

René did not reappear at Greenwood for two years. At the end of the first year I religiously kept the promise I had given to Sara, by sending him the letter she had written on the eve of her death. He sent me a message of thanks through his uncles, but as yet I knew nothing of the contents of the letter from beyond the grave.

About this time the papers related the tragical death of a very rich and eccentric old Englishman. He had fallen down a precipice in one of the most dangerous parts of the Swiss Alps, dragging with him his wife, who was obliged to accompany him everywhere, and had been seeking an opportunity of eluding the vigilance of

this unreasonable man, with whom it was almost impossible to live. Thus we learned the sad end of my stepmother.

Sara was just three years old, when to our great grief, an event occurred which we had sometimes anticipated, but generally put away from our thoughts. René sent for his child. All the reasons and pretexts by which I endeavoured to support the objections my uncles made to parting with her were overruled by his will: child and nurse left Greenwood.

For six months my uncles were angry with him. The departure of a child leaves such a blank in a house, and Sara's songs and laughter and footsteps were sadly missed in the old manor-house. At last their annoyance gave place to projects of reconciliation. They even proposed to let all the past be obliterated and to let René come back and live with them. Why did he need an employment? Although his fortune had been seriously diminished, there was quite enough coming to him by-and-by to make him independent.

I heard at the same time of these negotiations and of René's consent; and his expected arrival was a cause of undisguised joy to the two old men.

I had not been consulted on the subject, if I had I should have preferred his continued absence. What a strange fate it was for us to be again thrown together and to occupy a position in many ways similar to that which we had held some six years before! The prospect saddened and disquieted me, and I resolved, from the beginning, to adopt a line of conduct which should render any return to the former state of things impossible. My aunt's condition furnished me with a sufficient reason for not leaving Rosevale, and I could avoid Greenwood in my walks. The dead are soon forgotten; but I hoped that René would not often call upon us. Our common memories were too sad to allow of a revival of the intimate intercourse of other days.

Having settled my future course in my own mind, I wished before his arrival to give myself the satisfaction of taking my favourite walk to Greenwood by the fields for the last time. After crossing the bridge, I stood musing, with my eyes fixed on the familiar path by the meadows; the blue forget-me-nots were still growing there. This spot, with its sweet and bitter memories, had a melancholy charm for me, and at the moment I was under its influence. The past, with

its bright promises rose up before me, the dream of my youth, with all its appearance of reality, was again present. All at once, above the sound of the running water, I heard that of footsteps, and at the end of the path René appeared, leading his child by the hand. A shudder of pain passed over me, and then my pride took alarm. What must he have thought of me? How would he interpret my presence there? When the first impression had passed away I composed myself, and as I could not well turn back, I walked on, taking the side of the road opposite to that which he had chosen.

When we met he bowed to me. Much as I should have liked to embrace little Sara, an interview under the existing circumstances seemed too embarrassing, and I walked on without appearing to notice that he was standing still with his head uncovered.

But the little one, though she did not recognise me, took hold of my dress, and in one of the sudden outbreaks of politeness sometimes to be observed in children, said "Good-morning," graciously, raising towards me such a droll, sweet little face that I stooped to kiss her.

"What a likeness!" I said, as I parted the fair hair which waved on her forehead.

"Do you think so, Gabrielle?" answered the father, sadly.

It was the first time he had spoken to me since our engagement had been broken off, at Daniel Ville, six years before.

"You have been very good to this child," he added; "let me thank you."

"I was very fond of Sara, cousin."

"You proved it, and therefore my first thought on arriving this morning was to bring her child to see you."

"Aunt Desireé will be delighted to see her; you are sure to find her at home."

"I hear that she is not able to leave her armchair from gout."

"It is but too true, I grieve to say, and I seldom leave her. To-day a friend is with her; so I am taking the opportunity of going to see my uncles."

"We might turn back to Greenwood with you, and make our visit to Rosevale another day," he said, with some hesitation.

"That would not do for my aunt, who will be so delighted to see Sara. Good-bye, cousin."

I kissed the little one's cheek and left them. After a short visit at Greenwood I returned to Rosevale by another way. René had just gone when I arrived. Aunt Desirée thought him wonderfully improved.

"Now, at any rate, he looks like a respectable man," she said, in a satisfied tone.

Sara came in for her share of praise, too. "She is pretty," said my aunt, "a perfect picture, and as clever as she can be. Fancy her calling out in the midst of our conversation, 'Papa, the lady we met on the road was Mamma Gabrielle!"



XXV.

ENÉ'S visits gradually became more and more frequent, and notwithstanding all my foresight our relations assumed a character of cordiality, and were free from all constraint. Sara was the bond of union. She loved us both, and whatever was the state of the weather she must needs come and see Mamma Gabrielle. She used to bring me books and papers, which were read first in one house and then in the other. She had a little bed at Rosevale; and when the gentlemen came to spend the evening with us, we put her to sleep there, and sent her home the next morning.

A year went by; René, while still remaining a man of the world, had again become good, generous, and devout. He also took to his gun, and led much the same life as of old. During the hunting season we saw less of him, but he was in better spirits and better health.

One morning when, strange to say, we had been three days without meeting, I was summoned to the drawing-room. René and his child were there; the little one was very quiet, and René appeared much affected.

When I had sat down, he took a paper from his pocket-book, and handed it to me. It was an old letter, for the ink of the address had turned yellow.

"But, René, this letter is addressed to you," I said, somewhat astonished.

"Pray, read it, Gabrielle: it concerns you as much as me," he said.

I looked at it again, and this time more closely: the reason of his emotion was explained, for it was the letter I had sent him by Sara's request.

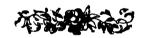
I took the sheet from its envelope, and read as follows: "Dear René, I am going to die. Oh, the thought of it breaks my heart; for, I must leave you and leave my child! I should

have liked to live for you both, and also to make up for my past folly. I looked on life as a mere holiday, without ever thinking that sooner or later it must come to an end. I repent, and now, in this solemn hour, when my soul feels that eternity is so near, I would give all my vanities and foolish pleasures for one duty well performed. God is good and very merciful, and my sorrow is sincere; that gives me hope. I ask you to forgive me, and I make one request: my dear little girl is more precious than life itself to me, and I am dreadfully anxious about her future. There is only one woman on earth who could take her mother's place, and she is the one whom I have unfortunately supplanted in your affections, and whose place in your heart I have usurped. Never give her any mother but Gabrielle. I could die in peace if I might venture to hope that this, my great wish, would be fulfilled. This is Sara's last desire: if possible, let it be accomplished. Good-bye, goodbye."

This letter stunned me, and I remained silent, amazed, and troubled. While Aunt Desirée, to whom I handed the letter, was reading it, René rose, and placing Sara on my lap, said, tenderly:

"Gabrielle, you cannot refuse this touching prayer. It is not I who ask, but the one who is gone. I implore you to be my child's mother."

Aunt Desirée looked at me with tearful eyes, which seemed to bid me consent. I asked for two days to think about it.



TO THE READER.

MAGINE to yourself a country-house, not a castle, not an ordinary house, but a sort of French cottage, situated in the midst of a large, fertile, wooded lawn, surrounded by a quickset hedge. Birds make their nests in this wall of verdure, and Spring covers it with perfumed flowers. The front of the cottage is white, and the Venetian blinds are of a special shade of green, which I can only compare to the hue of the young tender leaves. The gravelled paths of the flower-ground meet in front of a large glass door, which opens on a little hall. With its table covered with a cloth and laden with books, its sofa and its chairs, it makes a pleasant sitting-room in summer. It has three doors, and one of them now opens to admit a charming little girl four or five years of age. A black-and-tan King Charles lap-dog follows. They gambol together for a moment, the child shakes her

head and covers her face with a mass of hair, which shines in the sunshine like gold, the little dog raises its paw and pushes the veil aside. Then, when he sees the beautiful eyes, the rosy mouth, and the sweet face, he barks with joy, and the game begins again. All at once the child gets up, throws her thick hair gracefully back, and runs to a door which she partly opens. Let us take our time, for however narrow the space we must follow her. She says to the dog, with a gesture of authority: "Don't come in, Tiny;" then puts her head into the room, and asks: "Shall Tiny and I come in, Mamma Gabrielle?"

"Certainly," answers a pleasant, feminine voice.

The child opens the door and goes in, the dog darts forward like an arrow, and then the door is closed on them both. But we have glided in too: the room is of a medium size; the carpet, curtains, and furniture harmonise in colour; nothing surprises the eye, but everything pleases. Six persons are gathered near the green marble chimney-piece—for it is a fine winter day, cold enough to make a fire pleasant.

We must give a little sketch of this party. At the right of the fireplace, on a sofa, there is an old lady in a cap, with a broad and ruddy countenance

which expresses the most complete satisfaction; this can be no other but Aunt Desirée. Opposite to her are two men, whose erect forms and strong limbs make them seem almost young, while their white hair and beards are tokens of age. These are Mr. Francis and Mr. Felix du Bressy. In a chair close to Aunt Desirée is seated a tall woman, her complexion is dark, her features are irregular, and notwithstanding her black hair, her good teeth, and a slight, graceful figure, which many a pretty woman might envy, she is plain. The sweetness of her smile and the intelligent expression of her countenance, enable us to recognise Gabrielle. At twenty-six Gabrielle is better-looking than she was at eighteen, for her colour is not so high; and, as compared with some of her cotemporaries, she reminds one of a flower of sober hue and vigorous growth, less brilliant than a rose, but more durable. René du Bressy completes the circle. Gabrielle's history has already made us acquainted with him. His face and hands are somewhat tanned, but all the former roughness of manner and of physiognomy has vanished, he is handsome, and grave, and he looks happy.

When little Sara appeared, everyone kissed

her. As she turned from her father's embrace, he came close to Gabrielle, and said: "I think I love the child doubly now, for I owe my happiness in part to her, do I not?"

"Perhaps," said Gabrielle.

"No one is looking at Tiny," said Sara, who was making the little dog walk on his hind legs. "See how pretty he is, and how nicely he is bidding good-morning."

Tiny was shaking his pretty little head, and trying playfully to nibble the hands that imprisoned him.

"Tiny is a very good little dog, but, just now, he must not stay in the drawingroom," said René. "Send him away, Sara," he added, comparing his watch with the clock.

The child obeyed, and then came back and seated herself on a little stool between Aunt Desirée and Gabrielle.

"This must be Sunday," she observed, with the thoughtful air of a child struck by a new idea.

"This is Tuesday, my love," said Mr. Felix.

"No, Sunday," replied Sara, decidedly. "Is it not Sunday, Mamma Gabrielle?"

"Why do you think it is Sunday, Sara?" asked Gabrielle.

Sara spread out her little blue frock and looked complacently at the embroidered trimming, and at the boots which enclosed her pretty little feet.

"Because I have got on my best frock and my new boots, and because you have got on your lilac silk dress, and because Aunt Desirée is not knitting."

As she concluded this satisfactory explanation the clock struck six, the door opened, and two gentlemen, followed by an old peasant, entered. Everyone rose, the peasant was addressed as "his worship the Mayor," and all began to talk of rain and fine weather. Presently, after a little further conversation, he put on his scarf and seated himself at a table, in front of which Gabrielle, René, and four witnesses took their places, and thus, without any pomp or show, their civil marriage was performed. The religious ceremony was to take place with equal simplicity on the following day.

After dinner the official and the witnesses left Rosevale. The Greenwood guests remained longer, and spent the evening in Aunt Desirée's room. Sara was asleep in an adjoining chamber. It was only ten o'clock when Mr. Francis rose and gave the signal for departure. The conversation had been very flagging. Aunt Desirée was vainly fighting against sleep, and the old uncles did not consider René and Gabrielle, who generally had plenty to say for themselves, at all at their best that evening.

Finally, sleep completely conquered Aunt Desirée, and the party had to break up. She roused herself to bid good-night, and the guests departed.

"Well, my child, so you are bound," said the dear old lady, rubbing her eyes. "Truly, the decrees of Providence are marvellous! Who could have thought that, after all, you would be Mrs. du Bressy? I always did say that things generally turn out quite contrary to our expectations. Now your romance is at an end, and really, if it were printed, it would be very interesting."

Gabrielle smiled with the sweet arch smile which greatly improved her appearance.

"Do you think so, aunt?"

"Certainly:—and your journal, that wonderful journal with the green cover that you showed me the other day, that is finished, too."

"Why so, aunt?"

"Because when people are married they give up all those little things."

- "Not always;—present happiness ought not to make one forget the past."
 - "So you will keep your journal?"
- "Of course I will," said Gabrielle. "Who knows," she added, playfully, "if I won't publish it some day under the name of 'An Ugly Woman?"
- "Ugly!" exclaimed Aunt Desirée, fairly shocked;—" who, then, is the heroine?"

Gabrielle did not think it well to discuss so delicate a question; and, besides, at this moment Renotte-the austere and faithful Renotte, who had spent the evening, first in singing her longest ditty in a slow and tuneless voice to Sara, and then in watching Sara while she slept-came to help Aunt Desirée to prepare for her night's rest. Gabrielle did preserve the journal, as she said, and the journal has become a book. And now that you have finished it, dear reader, you will conclude that, whether pretty, or, like Mrs. du Bressy, not well treated by nature in the matter of looks, with a loving heart, an even temper, high and noble feelings, and, above all, true practical religion, a woman may be happy and may win solid affection. Beauty is not enough, for this charming fragile gift has two great enemies-time, which

pitilessly impairs it, and custom, which is no less implacable, but custom strengthens affection of a sterling nature. If a woman who is without external attractions does not meet with the flattering attention and the commonplace sympathy which beauty commands, she can always ensure the sincere affection of family and friends; and this is what I wish you, for it alone is durable.



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